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MISCELLANIES

BY

ALGERNON CHARLES SWINBURNE

London
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1886

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PREFACE.

The brief memoir of Mary Queen of Scots, and the critical monographs on Congreve, Keats, and Landor, which reappear in this volume, have already appeared in the *Encyclopædia Britannica*. Most of the other articles here reprinted were first published in the *Nineteenth Century* or the *Fortnightly Review*. For the miscellaneous character of such a collection the title selected as the only one appropriate must be taken as conveying whatever may be thought requisite of apology or excuse. For the opinions or the expressions of opinion thus republished on literary or other matters I have no such plea to offer in arrest of judgment from any quarter. I have had the honour to be assailed with some vehemence for the disrespect shown in my occasional reference to writers whose ability no rational man could be supposed capable of denying. All belief involves or implies a corresponding disbelief: it is impossible, if words have any meaning, for any one who understands that meaning to assert that he believes in original sin, or the infernal predestination of unregenerate or unchristened infancy, and in the same breath to proclaim his belief in the divine word which affirms that of such as unchristened and unregenerate children is the kingdom of heaven. We may believe in Christ or in Calvin, in St. John or in St. Augustine: but no

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man can believe in both : for one or the other must needs be a blasphemous liar. And as it is in the highest matters of faith, of hope, and of charity, so is it in matters of opinion, taste, or sympathy. We may heartily appreciate, we may cordially admire, the literary and personal energies of such writers as Byron and Carlyle : but we must recognize that the man who sees a great poet in the histrionic rhapsodist to whom all great poetry was hateful, or a great philosophic and political teacher in the passionate and distempered humourist whose religious ideal was a modified Moloch-worship, and whose political creed found practical expression in the plantations of a slave-owner and the dungeons of a Czar, does rightly or wrongly accept and respect the pretentions of writers who can be acceptable as prophets or respectable as teachers to no man who accepts the traditions of English independence or respects the inheritance of English poetry. On both these points I must confess myself an incurable conservative : I cannot echo the jeer or the lament of Byron, when the finger of his scorn was pointed at Shakespeare or at Milton, and the utterance of his regret for our barbarous violation of rules observed by such superior poets as Alfieri and Voltaire was intensified by the rage of egotism and inflamed by the virulence of envy : I cannot clap or rub my hands with Carlyle over the atrocities inflicted by William of Normandy upon Englishmen or by Nicholas of Russia upon Poles. I am so much a pedant as to prefer Hamlet to Childe Harold, and so much a reactionary as to prefer the teaching of Areopagitica to the teaching of Latterday Pamphlets : and I am so narrow-minded a partisan, so short-sighted a sectarian, as to believe a choice between the one creed and the other no less necessary in matters of taste than in matters of principle. From the genius of the eminent writer who chose to make his entry into literary life under the

self-selected name of Devilsdung I have derived, if no great amount of durable edification, so much intellectual or physical enjoyment and such keen emotion of sustained and admiring interest, that I am not curious to inquire why it should be considered unbecoming to prefer, in speaking of Swift's most distinguished imitator and most unabashed disciple, the surely more decent and indeed comparatively inoffensive designation of Coprostom or Cloacinus: but when I am reminded by friends or others that my estimate of Byron is far different from the opinion professed by a poet whom I should rank among the greatest of all time, I cannot but avow that my belief in Shelley is not the belief of a papist in his Pope or a bibliolater in his Bible. I may of course be wrong in thinking so lightly as I certainly do think of his critical or judicial faculty; but I cannot consent to overlook or pretend to ignore the significance of the fact that the great poet who bowed down his laurels before Byron's was also proud to acknowledge his inferiority to Moore, and exuberant in the expression of his humility before the superior genius of Leigh Hunt. There is nothing more singular in the character of Shelley than the union of self-devoted and heroic sincerity in all serious matters of action or speculation with an apparent or rather an evident excess of deference to the real or imaginary claims of courtesy or convention when addressing or mentioning an elder or a contemporary poet whose opinions were not on all points discordant or incompatible with his own. I cannot bring myself to believe that he really believed himself inferior as a poet to the authors of *The Bride of Abydos*, *The Loves of the Angels*, and *The Story of Rimini*: but, however this may be, I cannot understand why his opinion on any one of these authors should be held as more important, accepted as more sincere, admitted as more serious, than his opinion on the others. And if my

incredulity does injustice to the scrupulosity of his truthfulness, I can only conclude that as surely as there has seldom been a poet of greater or of equal genius, so surely has there seldom been a critic of greater or of equal imbecility. For in his case we find no such explanation of the inexplicable as in the case of the distinguished living poet and critic, theologian and philosopher, whose practical definition of criticism would seem to be 'a something not ourselves, making for paradox.' The smiling academic irony of Mr. Matthew Arnold forbids us to consider too curiously the erratic and eccentric vehemence of misjudgment which seems at first sight a quality not properly belonging—not conceivable as natural or as native—to the same identity or individuality as that of an exquisite and original poet. But if the author of *Thyrsis* be the real Mr. Arnold, I cannot avoid the inference that the critic who places Byron above Shelley and Wordsworth above Coleridge is something not himself—something, shall we say, definable as a stream of tendency making for unrighteousness in criticism and inconsistent with righteousness in poetry? Be that as it may, the value and authority of Shelley's critical opinion may be gauged by the conclusive evidence of this damning fact—that he could trace no sign of Shakespeare's hand in the style of *The Two Noble Kinsmen*; a play in which the master's peculiar touch is as unmistakable by any competent reader as it is in *Pericles*; or, for that matter, as it is in *Hamlet*. The man who could venture to say, 'I do not believe Shakespeare wrote a word of it,' is simply out of court as a judge of composition or of style. To acknowledge this is no more inconsistent with appreciation of Shelley's greatness than it is inconsistent with appreciation of another great poet's pre-eminence to recognize that Coleridge was one of the most untrustworthy of verbal critics—that some of the various emendations or suggestions in his notes on

the text of Shakespeare and others are on a level with the worst ever proposed by the most presumptuous futility of the most preposterous among commentators. And yet no sane or candid student will question the incomparable value of Coleridge's finest critical work. Such a student, whether of literature or of history, will do his best, by the light of such faculties as nature may have given him, to see what are and what are not the worse and the better qualities, the weakness and the strength, the unwisdom and the wisdom, the ignoble and the honourable aspects of any character or of any work which he may undertake to examine and to judge. Nor will he care overmuch whether impertinence and folly may or may not misread and misrepresent his conclusions or his words. The question, for instance, with regard to Mary Stuart, is not whether it is better or worse to commit murder and adultery than to be a coward and a fool, but whether a person brought up where adultery and murder were regarded less as mortal than as venial sins, and less as venial sins than as social distinctions, is likely to be unaffected by the atmosphere of such an education, or is as culpably responsible for its results as either a woman or a man would be for absolute and scandalous deficiency in wellnigh the only virtue which even in that society was unanimously exacted and esteemed. To confound the statement of this question with acceptance or approval of the views on ethical matters which were then and there prevalent would be the veriest lunacy of rabid error; to affect such a misconstruction, and to use it as a plea or a handle for disingenuous attack, would be the veriest dotage of drivelling insolence. Reserving always as unquestionable and indisputable the primal and instinctive truths of æsthetics as of ethics, of art as of character, of poetry as of conduct, we are bound under penalty of preposterous failure, of self-convicted and self-

conscious injustice, to take into full and fair account the circumstances of time and accident which affected for better or for worse the subjects of our moral or critical sentence. The best and the greatest are not above or beyond the need of such consideration ; and some due allowance of it, not sufficient to disturb the balance of our judgment or derange the verdict of our conscience, should possibly be extended to the meanest and the worst.

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SHORT NOTES ON ENGLISH POETS:

CHAUCER; SPENSER; THE SONNETS OF SHAKESPEARE; MILTON.

It was no unmemorable day in the history of English letters when Thomas Campbell, the Callistratus of Great Britain, undertook to select and comment on his Specimens of the British Poets with the hand which had given to England her only two great national songs. No hand, it must have been thought, could be fitter for this only less glorious task; and with all its grave and many shortcomings his collection held its place for full sixty years, unrivalled and unapproached, as the very flower of our too manifold anthologies. A yet greater and heavier undertaking has in our own day been attempted and accomplished by a more thoughtful and sometimes a more trustworthy critic than Campbell. Having before this had occasion to remark in terms of somewhat strong deprecation on the principle adopted by Mr. William Rossetti in his revision and rearrangement of the text of our greatest lyric poet, I am the more desirous to bear witness to the elevation and the excellence of his critical workmanship in his *Lives of Famous Poets*. On some points I differ gravely from his estimate; once or twice I differ from it on all points; but on the whole I find it not acceptable merely but

admirable as the very best and most sufficient ever yet given of some at least among the leading names of our poets.

Four of these are by him selected as composing the supreme quadrilateral of English song. It is through no lack of love and reverence for the name of Chaucer that I must question his right, though the first narrative poet of England, to stand on that account beside her first dramatic, her first epic, or her first lyric poet. But, being certainly unprepared to admit his equality with Shakespeare, with Milton, and with Shelley, I would reduce Mr. Rossetti's mystic four to the old sacred number of three. Pure or mere narrative is a form essentially and avowedly inferior to the lyrical or the dramatic form of poetry ; and the finer line of distinction which marks it off from the epic marks it also thereby as inferior.

Of all whose names may claim anything like equality of rank on the roll of national poets—not even excepting Virgil—we may say that Chaucer borrowed most from abroad, and did most to improve whatever he borrowed. I believe it would be but accurate to admit that in all his poems of serious or tragic narrative we hear a French or Italian tongue speaking with a Teutonic accent through English lips. It has utterly unlearnt the native tone and cadence of its natural inflections ; it has perfectly put on the native tone and cadence of a stranger's ; yet is it always what it was at first—*lingua romana in bocca tedesca.* It speaks not only with more vigour but actually with more sweetness than the tongues of its teachers ; but it speaks after its own fashion no other than the lesson they have taught.

Chaucer was in the main a French or Italian poet, lined thoroughly and warmly throughout with the substance of an English humourist. And with this great gift of specially English humour he combined, naturally as it were and inevitably, the inseparable twin-born gift of peculiarly English pathos. In the figures of Arcite and Grisilde, he has actually outdone Boccaccio's very self for pathos: as far almost as Keats was afterwards to fall short of the same great model in the same great quality. And but for the instinctive distaste and congenital repugnance of his composed and comfortable genius from its accompanying horror, he might haply have come nearer than he has cared or dared to come even to the unapproachable pathos of Dante. But it was only in the world of one who stands far higher above Dante than even Dante can on the whole be justly held to stand above Chaucer, that figures as heavenly as the figures of Beatrice and Matilda could move unspotted and undegraded among figures as earthly as those of the Reve, the Miller, and the Wife of Bath: that a wider if not keener pathos than Ugolino's or Francesca's could alternate with a deeper if not richer humour than that of Absolon and Nicholas.

It is a notable dispensation of chance—one which a writer who might happen to be almost a theist might designate in the deliciously comical phrase of certain ambiguous pietists as 'almost providential'—that the three great typical poets of the three great representative nations of Europe during the dark and lurid lapse of the Middle Ages should each afford as complete and profound a type of a different and alien class as of a different and alien people. Vast as are the diversities

of their national and personal characters, these are yet less radical than the divergences between class and class which mark off each from either of his fellows in nothing but in fame. Dante represents, at its best and highest, the upper class of the dark ages not less than he represents their Italy; Chaucer represents their middle class at its best and wisest, not less than he represents their England; Villon represents their lower class at its worst and its best alike, even more than he represents their France. And of these three the English middle class, being incomparably the happiest and the wisest, is indisputably, considering the common circumstances of their successive times, the least likely to have left us the highest example of all poetry then possible to men. And of their three legacies, precious and wonderful as it is, the Englishman's is accordingly the least wonderful and the least precious. The poet of the sensible and prosperous middle class in England had less to suffer and to sing than the theosophic aristocrat of Italy, or the hunted and hungry vagabond who first found articulate voice for the dumb longing and the blind love as well as for the reckless appetites and riotous agonies of the miserable and terrible multitude in whose darkness lay dormant, as in a cerecloth which was also a chrysalid, the debased and disfigured godhead which was one day to exchange the degradation of the lowest populace for the revelation of the highest people —for the world-wide apocalypse of France. The golden-tongued gallows-bird of Paris is distinguished from his two more dignified compeers by a deeper difference yet—a difference, we might say, of office and of mission no less than of genius and of gift. Dante and Chaucer

are wholly and solely poets of the past or present—singers indeed for all time, but only singers of their own: Villon, in an equivocal and unconscious fashion, was a singer also of the future; he was the first modern and the last mediæval poet. He is of us, in a sense in which it cannot be said that either Chaucer or Dante is of us, or even could have been; a man of a changing and self-transforming time, not utterly held fast, though still sorely struggling, in the jaws of hell and the ages of faith.

But in happy perfection of manhood the great and fortunate Englishman almost more exceeds his great and unfortunate fellow-singers than he is exceeded by them in depth of passion and height of rapture, in ardour and intensity of vision or of sense. With the single and sublimer exception of Sophocles, he seems to me the happiest of all great poets on record; their standing type and sovereign example of noble and manly happiness. As prosperous indeed in their several ages and lines of life were Petrarca and Ariosto, Horace and Virgil; but one only of these impresses us in every lineament of his work with the same masculine power of enjoyment. And when Ariosto threw across the windy sea of glittering legend and fluctuant romance the broad summer lightnings of his large and jocund genius, the dark ages had already returned into the outer darkness where there is weeping and gnashing of teeth—the tears of Dante Alighieri and the laughter of François Villon. But the wide warm harvest-field of Chaucer's husbandry was all glorious with gold of ripening sunshine while all the world beside lay in blackness and in bonds, throughout all those ages of death called ages

of faith by men who can believe in nothing beyond a building or a book, outside the codified creeds of a Bible or the œcumenical structures of a Church.

Before I take my reverent leave of Chaucer, I will express in passing a slight sense of regret that Mr. Rossetti should not have added to his notice of the *Troilus and Cryseide*—a choice passage of exquisite analysis and panegyric, with every word of which I most cordially concur—some little note of applause for the Scottish poet Henryson's equally adventurous and admirable sequel to that poem. For truth and power of pathetic imagination, the last meeting of Troilus with the wayside leper who once had all his heart, and played it all away at the May-game of light love, may be matched against the very best work of Chaucer: nor do I remember anything in it all so deeply and truly tragic as the doom of the transformed and disfigured traitress, who, meeting no recognition in the eyes of her old lover as he looks on her and sighs and passes, with an alms thrown sadly as to a stranger, falls back and dies in silence.

The earnest search or labour after righteousness of judgment and absolute accuracy of estimate which always, whether it may finally succeed or fail, distinguishes the critical talent of Mr. Rossetti is very happily exemplified in his analysis and summary of the aims and the claims of Spenser. His judgment or his sentiment on this matter may be said to strike a balance between the enthusiastic devotion of Scott and Southey, Ruskin and Leigh Hunt, and the wearied indifference or positive distaste of Landor. As a descendant of the great Latin race, he has naturally by way of birth-

right the gift which he is bound to have, an inborn sense of rule and outline which makes him instinctively aware of Spenser's shortcoming on that side, and logically averse from the luminous and fluid nebulosity of Spenser's cloudy and flowery fairyland. The lack of tangible form and line, of human flesh and breath and blood on the limbs and at the lips and in the veins of Spenser's active or passive and militant or triumphant congregation of impersonated virtues and vices, is inevitably perceptible to a scholar and evangelist of Dante, who must perforce be unconsciously inclined to measure all poets more or less after the standard of the mighty master whose missionary he was born by right at once of inheritance and of intelligence. Dante was beyond all other poets a materialist;—and this, I have heard it remarked, is of course what Blake meant to convey by the quaint apparent paradox of his essentially accurate objection to the 'atheism' (as he called it) of Dante; with whom the finest forms of abstract qualities that the scholastic ingenuity of mediæval metaphysicians could devise and define became hard and sharp and rigid as tempered steel. Give Dante a moral image, he will make of it a living man: show Spenser a living man, he will make of him a moral image. It is not to the existence of allegory in Spenser that all save his fanatical admirers object; it is to the fact that this allegory, like Mrs. Malaprop's 'on the banks of the Nile,' is a rapacious and insatiable impostor who attracts and devours all living likenesses of men and women within reach. There is allegory also in Homer and in Dante: but prayers in Homer and qualities in Dante become vital and actual forms of

living and breathing creatures. In Spenser the figure of a just man melts away into the quality of justice, the likeness of a chaste woman is dissolved into the abstraction of chastity. Nothing can be more alien from the Latin genius, with its love of clearness and definite limitation, than this indefinite and inevitable cloudiness of depiction rather than conception, which reduces the most tangible things to impalpable properties, resolves the solidest realities into smoke of perfumed metaphor from the crucible of symbolic fancy, and suffuses with Cimmerian mist the hard Italian sunlight. Add to this the cloying sweetness of the Spenserian metre, with all 'its treasures of fluidity and sweet ease' (as Mr. Arnold, with his usual studious felicity of exquisite phrase, has so perfectly described it), which leaves at least some readers, after a dose of a few pages, overgorged with a sense that they have been eating a whole hive's harvest of thick pressed honey by great spoonfuls, without one halfpennyworth of bread to this intolerable deal of sweet-stuff; and it is easy to determine why the attraction of this noble poet, for all his luminous colour and lovely melody, the raiment of high thinking and fine feeling, is perhaps less potent than it should be over minds first nurtured on the stronger fare of Greek or Latin or Italian song. The Tarpeian Muse of Spenser is not indeed crushed—there is too much vigorous and supple vitality in her lovely limbs for that—but she is heavily burdened if not sorely bruised by the ponderous and brilliant weight of allegoric shields, emblazoned with emblematic heraldry of all typic and chivalric virtues, which her poet has heaped upon her by way of signs and bucklers of her high and holy enterprise in

'fairy lands forlorn,' through twilight woodlands and flowery wastes of mythical and moral song. With almost equal truth he might be said to have founded and to have followed the fashion of allegorical poetry which in the next generation ran riot through the voluminous verse of his disciples till it reached its head, not even in the works of the two lesser Fletchers, but—as if the names of our dramatic Dioscuri were foredoomed to poetical conjunction and unconscious fellowship on far other ways than theirs—in the limitless and lampless labyrinth of Joseph Beaumont's *Psyche.* Allegory was no doubt a powerful factor to be reckoned with in casting up the account of English poetry before Spenser; but in the allegories of his most notable precursors down to Sackville there is surely as much more of body, of tangible and palpable outline, than in his, as there is less of it in any of his followers. I cannot, therefore, but think that the great influence of Spenser on succeeding poets whose lines of work lay outside the fields of lyric and dramatic verse was far from being good as well as great. Outside those fields there was no man—unless a not very significant exception be claimed for Drayton and for Daniel as narrative chroniclers of some small and partial note—there was no man till the sundawn of Milton who could make head for a moment against that influence. The one great poet who might have done this also as well as the work he did—the yet worthier and surely far mightier work of founding the tragic stage of England—had only time to leave us a broken sample of nobler narrative and purer power than Spenser's, in the unimitated if not inimitable model of his *Hero and Leander.* And all who came

after them found it easier to follow the discursive and decorative style of Spenser than the more 'simple, sensuous, and passionate' manner of Marlowe.

Mr. Rossetti's critical memoir of Shakespeare is in its kind a most absolute and masterly model of simple and sufficient workmanship. The little all we know concerning the master of us all who know aught of English song is here arranged and explained with blameless care and fine lucidity of brief yet full remark. I observe only one seeming slip of memory or passing lapse of attention; his oversight of the generally noticed and obviously noticeable fact that the very first line of the anti-Lucian doggrel affixed by tradition to the gate of Charlecote Park with the apocryphal hand of Shakespeare bears the stamp on it of forgery, in the linguistic anachronism of the title or titles therein bestowed on Sir Thomas.

But the central jewel of this excellent essay, and the crowning glory of this admirable book, is the commentator's summary of opinion as to the subject and significance of the sonnets. What Coleridge, under the kindly influence of a far too indulgent mood, said 'in his haste' of Weber's Beaumont and Fletcher, may with simple justice be said of Mr. Rossetti's brief and perfect bit of work upon this difficult matter. We owe to him, 'I will not say the best—for that would be saying little—but a good' commentary on the sonnets of Shakespeare. I speak here especially of 'the second and shorter,' but (as Mr. Rossetti does not perhaps sufficiently observe or emphasize) incomparably the more important and altogether precious 'division of the sonnets.' Upon this question it seems to me that he,

and he alone among all commentators of whom I know anything, has seen and spoken, as far as is now or perhaps ever was possible to see and speak, 'the truth, the whole truth, and nothing but the truth.' I do not care—be it said with all genuine and cordial respect—to follow him any more than others into the fruitless and thorny ground of word-splitting debate as to the discernible personality of one Will or two Wills on whose name the greatest man who ever bore it has once and again rung fantastic changes of quibbling and smiling rhyme; what I recognize and what I would indicate as worthy of all praise is the writer's own recognition of the plainly probable truth, expressed in a terse and luminous exposition of the apparent evidence: to the surely quite simple and natural effect, that the younger friend whom Shakespeare loved with such a tender and passionate admiration of his noble and attractive qualities—his inward and outward, casual and essential endowments of mind and person—as could only be possible to a man of radically noble and high-minded nature, and could only express itself after the ardent fashion of the sonnets in the single age and generation of Shakespeare, did wilfully or involuntarily seduce from him the not invaluable affections of a paramour who had for some time obtained a hold upon the mind as well as the senses of Shakespeare which he felt to be injurious and unworthy of his better instincts, knowing that the ill-requited affection which he bore to the friend who had won from him her heart or her fancy was yet a wiser and worthier feeling than the perverse and reluctant passion which still attracted him towards the malign and dangerous beauty of their common

mistress: in a word, that the man's friendship, however far he might have been led astray by the temptress from its honest and straightforward course, was better worth his keeping or regretting than such love as could be given to either by such a woman. So chaotic and comfortless a result of Shakespeare's ultimate relations towards a mistress and a friend may be deplorable enough for sympathetic worshippers of his genius to contemplate, but is surely neither unprecedented nor unparalleled nor improbable in itself. And we have the combined evidence of all tradition and of all his later works to show that Shakespeare, however hard he may have had to swim for a time against this sea of personal troubles, did long before his latter days succeed in taking better arms against them than those of suicide, and did, after some fashion worthier of himself, in time by opposing end them.

A name so illustrious has recently been added to the list of theirs who dispute or deny the supposition that even in his sonnets the most inscrutably impersonal of poets did actually 'unlock his heart,' that it might seem negligent if not insolent to take no account of such antagonism to the opinion which to me seems so clearly just and right. Mr. Browning, perhaps in all points the furthest removed from Wordsworth of all poets in this century, cites with something of a sneer the well-known expression of Wordsworth which gives us his opinion to that effect; and, as if scornfully rejecting a supposed suggestion that he also should do likewise, retorts in a tone of assured defiance—

> Did Shakespeare? If so, the less Shakespeare he!

No, I must venture to reply; no whit the less like

Shakespeare, but undoubtedly the less like Browning. In the dedication of *Luria* and *A Soul's Tragedy*, the exact distinctive quality of the immortal man to whom those noble plays are dedicated was defined with admirable accuracy: Landor is 'a great dramatic poet,' as opposed to a great dramatist: and they are not the least ardent and studious admirers of Mr. Browning himself, who think that the same distinctive definition is not less accurately applicable to his own genius also. Now, even in default of his personal and articulate evidence to that effect, we should have guessed that Mr. Browning was in no wise wont to unlock his heart with any metrical key to any direct purpose—except, as it might be, 'for once,' when exchanging, with such happy effect, a 'bronze' for a 'silver' instrument. But Shakespeare, not being simply 'a great dramatic poet' like Browning or like Landor, but a great dramatist in the most absolute and differential sense of the phrase, might on that very account (it seems to me) be the likelier and the more desirous, under certain circumstances which for us must be all uncertain, to relieve and disburden his mind—to unload his heart rather than to unlock it—in short personal poems of a kind as alien from the special genius or spiritual instinct of Mr. Browning as is the utterly impersonal gift of impersonation, not in one form at a time but in many forms at once, by dint of more than dramatic renunciation or annihilation of himself, which makes him the greatest of all dramatists as surely as he is not the greatest of all dramatic poets.

Of Milton Mr. Rossetti speaks with less ardent reverence than might be expected from a republican, though

not, it must be owned, than might have been expected from a disciple of Dante. For it is a notable and even deplorable fact that there is one great poet—though happily there is but one—whose disciples would seem to be disqualified by the fact of their discipleship from equal or due appreciation of almost any other. A Shakespearean adept may be a Miltonic believer; a worshipper of Homer or Æschylus, of Sophocles or Lucretius, may be a devout and loyal student of both our supreme Englishmen; but Dante would seem to be as jealous a God as he of the Jews in his most exacting and exclusive mood of monarchy. All his disciples 'continually do cry,' in direct or indirect fashion,

> οὐκ ἀγαθὸν πολυκοιρανίη· εἷς κοίρανος ἔστω,
> εἷς βασιλεύς·

and his name is Alighieri. For these Unitarians or Mahometans of Parnassus there is but one Muse, and Dante is her prophet. If we would not be reprobate in their eyes we must accept and worship as they do the idol, the whole idol, and nothing but the idol; we must not stop our noses in hell with loathing, nor distend our jaws with yawning in heaven; neither may we worship any other God. Most especially may we not offer sacrifice to any other great Christian or cosmogonic poet; for in him is the whole and sole theogony revealed by spiritual song. This is a hard saying, and I for one cannot hear it.

If indeed the inevitable question of spiritual value and intellectual insight were to be followed out to such length and depth as alone would suffice for discussion of the relations or adjustment of the balance

between these two great Christian poets, and for examination of their respective worth and weight as readers and interpreters of 'the sovereign scheme and divine riddle,' it would be necessary to go further; to pass out of the atmosphere of their Catholic or Calvinistic theologies and theogonies, and confront the supreme results of poetic wisdom under the influence of Christian doctrine, and within the precincts of Christian discipline, with those of the same spiritual power when working under far other conditions in the native sphere of free contemplation and solemn inquisition into natural mystery more sacred and more strange than all supernatural miracle. Immeasurably beyond contemplation of any Christian poet's capacity is the awfulness of Evil and Expiation, as symbolised in the Sophoclean grove of the Furies.[1] But at the ovens and the cesspools of Dante's hell, the soul, if the soul had fingers, would snap them. The perpetuation of the infinitely little for a perpetuity of infinitely mean suffering, the degradation of eternity by the eternity of degradation, in brutal and obscene horror of abject wickedness and abject anguish, is a conception below the serious acceptance of the ancient or the modern mind—fit only for the dead and malodorous level of mediæval faith.

A single sentence of Mr. Rossetti's essay sums up in fourteen emphatic and expressive words the whole side or aspect of his opinion or feeling on the subject of Milton to which I cannot choose but take exception. 'Honour,' he says, 'is the predominant emotion naturally felt towards Milton—hardly enthusiasm—certainly

[1] Ch' ei sarebbero schivi,
Perch' ei fur Greci, forse del tuo detto.—*Inf.* xxvi. 74.

not sympathy.' In that case I am simply unable by any stretch of conjecture to imagine what name among all names of patriots or of poets may be found worthy to enkindle this enthusiasm which the mention of Milton's has left cold. Sympathy, indeed, we may well feel that we are hardly worthy to offer: for the very word implies some assumption of moral or spiritual equality; and he must indeed be confident of having always acted up to Milton's own ideal, and ever 'made of his own life a heroic poem,' who remembering this could think himself worthy to feel sympathy with the action and the passion of such lives as Milton's or Mazzini's. More reasonably may we feel as it were a righteous and a reverent delight in the sense of an inferiority which does not disable or deprive us of the capacity for adoration; a rapture of lowliness which exalts humility itself into something like the gladness of pride—of pride that we can feel and exultation that we may acknowledge how high above us are men who yet are not too high for the loyal thank-offering, not only of our worship, but surely also of our love.

Again, I must object that 'to appraise Milton' is not merely 'to appraise *Paradise Lost*;' nor, 'conversely,' can I admit that 'to appraise *Paradise Lost* is in the main,' by any manner of means, 'to appraise Milton.' His own preference, actual or traditional, relative or positive, for *Paradise Regained* is not properly to be dismissed with the conventional expression of astonishment at the unaccountable 'perversity' of its author's opinion. Much might be advanced in support or vindication of a judgment which should assign to it the higher place as a poem or complete work of art, while of

course reserving for *Paradise Lost* the claim of priority in episodical excellence—in splendour of separate points and exaltation of separate passages. In the central and crowning quality of harmonious and blameless perfection, the Iliad is not more excelled by the Odyssey than is *Paradise Lost* by *Paradise Regained.* In either case the name of the elder poem first of all reminds us of its noblest episodes : the mention of the younger brings back upon us before anything else the serene and supreme impression of the final whole. If this, as we may well believe, was all that Milton ever said or implied in his avowal of preference for the second child of his old age, he said no more than seems to my poor judgment absolutely just and right : as right as might reasonably be expected by men reasonable enough to perceive, and modest enough to acknowledge, the flagrant falsity and the impudent absurdity of the favourite opinion that a great man is probably not the best judge—if, indeed, he be not naturally the worst judge—as to the respective worth of his several great works.

Of all the leading poems which glorify our language none has ever been subjected to such perverse persistency of misjudgment as that which to some students may, from its proper point of view, not unworthily present itself as the master-work of Milton. From Dr. Johnson or from Lord Macaulay we are not surprised to hear the note of condemnation uttered in the key peculiar to either critic : but it is something more than singular to find this most majestic and pathetic of all Milton's works passed over without a word of comment attached to the naked mention of its name. And we cannot turn without keen disappointment from the

admirable definition given by Mr. Mark Pattison of *Samson Agonistes* as 'the intensest utterance of the most intense of English poets,' to the stupefying incongruity of his subsequent admission that 'as a composition the drama is languid, nerveless, occasionally halting, never brilliant;' nay, that the 'intense action of the presentative faculty is no longer at the disposal of the writer of *Samson*' (a hardly happy expression of a most unhappy judgment). 'The simplicity of *Samson Agonistes* is' anything but 'a flagging of the forces, a drying up of the rich sources,' and so forth. Of all other illustrious Englishmen the worthiest to applaud and the fittest to judge of Milton has borne heavily enough on some few sufficiently apparent shortcomings in the executive details of this heroic tragedy: but no other of all the most glorious among our countrymen could have paid to the crowning work of Milton such a tribute as this of Landor's.

'Reminiscences of many sad afflictions have already burst upon the poet, but instead of overwhelming him they have endued him with redoubled might and majesty. Verses worthier of a sovran poet, sentiments worthier of a pure, indomitable, inflexible republican, never issued from the human heart than these' (vv. 265–277) 'referring to the army, in the last effort made to rescue the English nation from disgrace and servitude.'

It is the fashion of our day to look for the typical man or representative figure of the English Commonwealth not so much in the poet who glorified as in the Dictator who destroyed it. This is but natural and consistent in such historians as see nothing in the record of our short-lived republic worth admiration or regret

but the triumph of a more harsh and earnest form of superstition over one somewhat less hellish in its cast of creed and greatly more graceful in its tone of life, accompanied by the substitution of a stern and steady system of dictatorial rule for the lax and trustless impulse of a treacherous and shifting tyranny: but those whose faith or feeling in the matter of historic patriotism lies deeper than a mere preference for competent over incompetent autocracy must perceive, or at least will believe, that the Restoration which they admire as little as any military-minded Neo-Calvinist or Muscovitic imperialist of their time was not so much the doing of James Monk as the work of Oliver Cromwell; a consummation of catastrophe directly rather than indirectly due to the weakness and selfishness of the nominal and temporary Protector, the actual and final destroyer, of the Commonwealth of England. For surely the dying hand which put into Richard Cromwell's the sceptre of its sway put by that act the crown of England into Monk's for delivery into Charles the Second's. And this, if we never have learnt it from the evidence of Milton himself, we may learn with equal confidence from Landor's that Milton surely saw. 'He had grown calmer at the close of life, and saw in Cromwell as a fault what he had seen before as a necessity or a virtue.' And therefore is it rather in the loftier, purer, more loyal and more liberal virtue of its poet, than in the dubious and double-faced majesty of its august and imperious Dictator, that we should salute the highest and most perfect type of the English republic; dragged down into his own grave by the fatal dead hand of Cromwell, yet surviving after a sort in the figure of the

blind man 'left upright'[1]—in the phrase of a poet as glorious and a republican as faithful as himself—on the verge and in the shadow of her sepulchre.

In private matters, or such as belong to the range of ethics rather than of politics, the instinct of Milton seems to me as much truer and finer than the instinct of Dante as his judgment and his conscience were juster, sounder, purer than the conscience or the judgment of Cromwell. Only those disciples in whom congenital idolatry has passed into the stage of acute monomania can maintain that the quality of Dante's great work is never in any considerable degree impaired by the incessant invasion of merely personal polemics ; that the reader is never, or but rarely, fatigued and nauseated by the obtrusion and obsession of 'verminous fellows,' whom the higher Muses at least should be content to leave in the native and natural shelter of that obscene obscurity which alone is proper to such autocoprophagous animalcules as make the filth they feed on. There are others besides the 'brothel lackeys' of a bastard empire, who, as Victor Hugo said once, would desire us to shut our eyes, but compel us to stop our noses. No matter what manner of offence may naturally be given by creatures whose very nature is offensive, a man who is duly and soberly conscious of any reason for self-respect will ultimately—as Milton did and Dante did not—determine that personal insolence, whether masked as Caliban or manifest as Thersites, shall draw down no further notice

[1] La République anglaise expire, se dissout,
Tombe, et laisse Milton derrière elle debout :
La foule a disparu, mais le penseur demeure ;
C'est assez pour que tout germe, et que rien ne meure.
VICTOR HUGO : *L'Année Terrible*, Prologue.

from his hand or foot. There are things unmentionable save by a too faithful pupil or too literal imitator of Swift, which, only for our own sake, we are careful not to spurn as we step over them. Upon such Milton did not hesitate to set his heel, when duly guarded by the thick-soled boot of prose ; but, unlike Dante, he never permitted the too fetid contact of their stercorous feculence to befoul the sandal of his Muse. The reddening knots of his controversial scourge fell only in cadences of prose, or at least but very rarely in brief reverberation of rhythmic numbers, on the noisome nudity exposed as in provocation of its lash by Saumaise or du Moulin, the literary lackey of a princeling or the cryptonymous railer for his bread. This high-souled and haughty respect for the dignity of his natural art should be duly borne in mind whenever we are tempted to dwell somewhat disapprovingly on Milton's indefatigable and fierce delight in 'double-thonging' such equivocal sons of a dubious kennel ; though it will not be denied that he spent more strength of arm than he need have wasted on the resonant reiteration of stripes from a deserved but superfluous dog-whip, too constantly sent curling about their currish flanks. It is certainly no very dignified amusement, no very profitable expenditure of energy or time, to indulge in the easy diversion of making such curs yelp, and watching them writhe under the chastisement which an insulted superior may condescend to inflict, till their foul mouths foam over in futile and furious response, reeking and rabid with virulent froth and exhalations of raging ribaldry. Yet when, like those that swarmed at the heels of Milton, the vermin venture on all possible extremes of personal

insult and imputation to which dullness may give ear or malice may give tongue, a man cannot reasonably be held to derogate from the duty and the dignity of self-respect if he spurns or scourges them out of his way. To give these rascals rope is a needless waste of hemp; a spider's thread, spun from the inner impurity of his own venomous vitals, will suffice for such a creature to hang himself.

A ground more plausible may seem to exist for a graver charge against Milton than that of a ferocious condescension to take unmerciful notice of such leprous little malignants as these; for the charge of relentless and immitigable savagery towards the dead, whose misdoings might seem—or to us may seem at this distance—to have been amply expiated by discomfiture and death. Cheap and not over-nice chivalry—the false Florimel who assumes and degrades the appearance of true knightliness of mind and sound nobility of spirit—is ever ready, when tyrants are fallen or when traitors are degraded, to remind us in the shrillest note of reproachful impertinence that 'it is ill boasting over dead men.' Ill indeed, and worse than ill, it is, when those who could see nothing to blame in Nero, nothing to loathe in Judas, till the moment of ruin which reduced them to suicide, begin to cast stones at the carrion which had been found worthy of their adoration when a pontiff, of their adulation when an emperor. But ill it would also be, abominable and absurd, if the 'piteous and unpitied end' of either were to be held as expiation sufficient to reverse the branding judgment or silence the damning voice of history or of poetry; to bid those now be silent out of pitiable pity and hypo-

critical high-mindedness, who did not hesitate, while some among the posthumous revilers as well as the posthumous champions of these wretches were prone before the vilest of all idols on their knees like the courtier or on their bellies like the serpent, to call Judas by his name of Iscariot and Nero by his name of Bonaparte.

The self-confident and self-conscious majesty of Milton's devotion and dedication to their natural work of all the faculties assigned to him by nature has foolishly enough been objected against him as evidence of his poetic inferiority to Shakespeare. With that unapproachable name no rational man will assert the equality of Milton's: but if Shakespeare's claim to superiority rested only on the evidence of his intellectual self-effacement, his modest unconsciousness and humble-minded abnegation or ignorance of his right to put forward any claim whatever, it would be but too easy a task to convict him out of his own mouth, and prove by the avowal of his own pretentions that he can pretend to the credit of no such imbecility. No sandier foundation was ever discovered for a fallacy more futile than this. No man ever lived who had less title than Shakespeare to whatever blessing may be reserved for the poor in spirit. Not even Milton, not even Dante, had less right to say in appeal to God or man, 'I am not high-minded.' No man's writings bear witness more unquestionable that he worked and waited with the haughty patience of self-assured expectation for the inevitable homage of mankind in centuries to come.

Had we no evidence to this effect—as happily we have much—beyond the affirmation and proclamation in sonnet after sonnet of his own intellectual rank

and spiritual prospect, it would be vain to advance against their evidence alone the doubtless irrefragable proposition 'that somewhat similar expressions were used by other sonnetteers, and they formed almost a commonplace of sonnet-literature.' Not less on this than on every other point the peculiar note of personal earnestness which pervades the leading sonnets of Shakespeare is unmistakable by the eye and ear of all 'save bats and owls.' That the eye and the ear of Mr. Rossetti belong to neither of these far too extensive literary classes, the following excerpt from his own text bears eloquent and triumphant witness.

> The trumpet-tone of all these lines is wondrously inspiriting; they express a perfect and splendid confidence. That Shakespeare, who led an inconspicuous life, and took no heed for the preservation of any of his writings later than the *Venus and Adonis* and the *Lucrece*,[1] should yet have known with such entire certainty that they would outlive the perishing body of men and things till the Resurrection of the Dead—this is the most moving fact in his extant history.

These words themselves deserve to put on immortality: there are none truer or nobler, wiser or more memorable, in the whole historic range of highest criticism.

[1] This, I must object, is a much more than dubitable assumption.

A CENTURY OF ENGLISH POETRY.

POETS, I have sometimes thought, may not improperly be divided, though doubtless by no mutually exclusive division, into two classes, definable by designations borrowed from ancient mythology ; the Giants and the Gods. Gods, indeed, there are among them of gigantic stature, and giants of godlike quality—godlike in grace and gentleness, as those others Titanic in port and power : but though the distinction may not always be equally easy to define, it can never in any case be really difficult to recognize. From the days of Shakespeare and Jonson to the days of Shelley and Byron, the difference between the two confronted and contrasted races is in the main perceptible and patent. Not often indeed so patent nor even always so perceptible as in these two crowning instances of contrast ; for usually the generations happy enough to be dominated and so made memorable by the presence and the pontificate of a master born and manifest of either kind have not also had the privilege, like those of Shakespeare and of Shelley, of Jonson and of Byron, to bring forth an almost equally notable and admirable exemplar of its opposite.

If ever before the days of Mirabeau there was a giant born at once into the double world of politics

and of letters, and foredoomed to show as many blots as he on either side of his literary and political escutcheon, that giant was undoubtedly John Dryden. The catalogue of his various offences against art and manhood, against duty and beauty alike, stands confessed as nothing less than terrible. And yet, when all is said that must or may or can be said in reprobation of all that has righteously been reckoned up to his discredit, the last verdict that leaps to our lips, the last comment that rises in our hearts, is surely always that of Mr. Browning on the 'rough-hammered head—great eye, gross jaw and griped lips' of the crown-grasper—What a man! The work of Dryden 'does what granite can to give' us the figure and the measure of the workman as surely as what marble can do in like manner is done for us by Milton's.

After a mental enumeration of the main points in Dryden's life and literary action, and a comparison between the ultimate summary of these and the actual impression left by the conclusion of that summary upon the student's mind, the upshot of all seems not less strange than if a most heavy list of charges, proved on all hands, should have been found on the whole to mount up hardly more to a result deserving of condemnation than to a result deserving of acquittal; nay, rather, in effect, to a result deserving of neither, but simply of general wonder and (so to speak) of wholesale admiration. The sun, we may say, is by no means too bright for us to see the darkness of the spots, but is far too strong for us to feel the chill of the shadow. He wrote some of the most shameful and revolting passages in our literature; he applauded some of the most shameful

and revolting passages in our history. He cheered on the hounds of the law and the vermin of the court to merciless cruelties against powerless innocence, to lawless treason against their common country. And for all this he remains yet an Englishman in whom all others worthy to judge of him must naturally and properly take no ignoble pride for ever.

'Full many a better man less bravely dieth,' says Artevelde of Gilbert Matthew in the noblest of all modern historical plays; and full many a better man has lived less bravely than John Dryden. It seems to me a shallow and hollow judgment which thinks to detect either cowardice or hypocrisy in the course or the process of his various conversions and conformities. He was, let it be granted, neither a man of strong principles nor a man of spiritual nature. Neither politics nor religion could be to him what either was to Milton. It does not follow that he must have been a cynic or a hypocrite, a Tartuffe or a Talleyrand. He was a strong-headed and stout-hearted man of the world, 'indifferent honest,' it may be something less than duly tender-conscienced. We feel that morality begins to verge on absurdity when we hear the comments of austere virtue on 'the successful profligacy,' not only of the wretched Waller, but of Dryden, delivered in a tone which seems to imply a community of infamy between the 'triple-turned' old prostitute of all parties and the young rebel against traditions of Puritan training and alliance; between the discredit incurred by the transference of a youth's crude or casual allegiance and the infamy which encircles the hoary head of an impenitent Iscariot. The action of

the poet may be condemned or deplored, but all righteous men must reserve all their scorn for the action of the poeticule.

It seems but poor praise for a poet of such high station, to say what must be said of Dryden, that he never works so well or moves so freely or rises so high as in the atmosphere of satire. But to the service of this presiding genius or goddess of his verse it must be owned that he brought such gifts and powers as never man but one had brought before. Nor was even Juvenal, if I may venture to guess, originally endowed by nature with a nobler faculty of speech or song. What he had and Dryden wanted was a firmer temper, a more solid faith. He knew always exactly what things they were that he hated—Imperialism and Democracy; and above all the horrible and hybrid bastard begotten of their monstrous copulation. Dryden, being neither an aristocrat nor a republican, wanted both the motive impulses, both the confederate supports, which at once instigated and sustained the satire of Juvenal. He was merely a royalist, and such an one as may be bred and reared out of the middle class. He had nothing in him of plebeian fire, and nothing of patrician chivalry. He had, as we may not doubt, a just and due sense of honesty, but scarcely —his most fervent admirers would scarcely claim it for him—a high or tender sense of honour. For so hardy and kindly a man, he was even deplorably unchivalrous. He is one of the few unhappy examples of the falsity or untrustworthiness of the noble superstition which we would fain hold fast, that a brave man will not hit his enemy when he is down. Dryden, one of the most

gallant of fighters after his own fashion, danced and trampled upon his when prostrate at his mercy. He is of course not blameable—he would rather of course have been praiseworthy—for defiance and violation of that most wicked and contemptible rule of conduct or of speech, for ever to be found recurrent on the lips of infidels and cowards who believe in no truth and are afraid of every falsehood—the liar's maxim and the traitor's plea, which forbids us to speak truth when to speak truth is to speak evil of the defeated, the dishonoured, and the dead. The memories of a Judas and a Nero are as carrion to remain gibbeted for ever, that every honest hand may cast a stone in passing towards the completion of a cairn of ignominy which no age will ever see complete. But the offence of Dryden is not capable of extenuation, far less of justification, by comparison with the practice of other great historic and satiric poets, from the date of Juvenal's verses on the dead Sejanus to the date of Hugo's verses on the dead Saint-Arnaud. His own, it must sorrowfully be said, are sometimes comparable rather with those of a poet who should have defiled himself by acclamation and encouragement of a Tiberius or even of a Bonaparte.

And yet—we must always come back to these two words, and always start afresh with them, after a word significant of aught but honour has been linked with the name or the thought of Dryden. 'Satire's narrow strait' (as Landor calls it) widened and deepened before the strong sweep of his oar-stroke into the resemblance and resonance of a sea. He added a new and a majestic note, if not one of the sweeter or pro-

founder, to the harmonies of English verse. Even where the broad loud wind of his sonorous song blows over fetid swamp or malarious morass, it is rather touched than tainted by the maleficence of their stagnant exhalations. The air swept in sunder so proudly by the play of his sailing wings is never dense or dim, never clogged or overcharged with miasmatic pestilence from the political Maremma which they traverse. And whithersoever they strike out in strong enjoyment of their inexhaustible strength—a strength so nobly bridled and guided by the curb and the compulsion at once of his instinct and his will—they make such mighty music of the most malodorous air that our senses for the minute are conscious of nothing but the large and fresh delight of their passage and their sound.

But after all it is idle—as many a reader may by this time be ready to remind me—it is idle to strain rhetoric and press metaphor into the service of criticism on the subject of a great writer whom no man but himself can properly or even possibly make known. He that would know anything whatever of Dryden must read, mark, learn, and inwardly digest the word of his message to his own time first, and secondly to ours. For to ours also he has a message; full of warning to many, but not less full of cheer and even of example for others, if they have ears to receive it aright. 'The Bacon of the rhyming crew' he is named by the great poet and critic to whom I have so recently referred (shall we call him a giant at home among the gods, or a god astray among the giants?); and the chancellor of the first Stuart who ruled in England has more than his genius in common with the laureate of the last. But in

one point of supreme importance—if Bacon be not grievously belied by the apparent evidence of history—there was a great gulf of difference fixed between them. John Dryden was no coward.

In the next couplet but one which follows the line just quoted from his noble and memorable address to Wordsworth, Landor has given the soundest estimate and expressed the justest praise of Dryden that ever has been given or expressed.

> Though never tender nor sublime,
> He wrestles with and conquers Time.

We may fancy—though undoubtedly the conjecture may be no less erroneous than assuredly it is audacious—that there is even more truth implied in the form of this admirable image than perhaps was designed or perceived by Landor himself. Dryden was not of those who conquer Time without an effort; who, having once lived, inevitably must live for ever. If a Shakespeare or even if a Milton was to be born, it followed as a natural and obvious consequence that he was not to die. But an earth-born and earth-bound giant like Dryden, if indeed he is to conquer immortality, must train himself to fight hard for it. The palm, though indisputably attainable, is not so evidently native in the climate of his birthplace, so naturally proper for the garland of his brows, that he can hope to wear it by proclamation of all spectators and concession of all rivals, before he has faithfully undertaken and dauntlessly performed all conditions of the listed field or the heroic playground of his peers. And this most assuredly was attempted and achieved by Dryden. But, unhappily alike for the full-

ness of his fame and for the purity of its record, he did not lay to heart the latter and the weightier half of an axiom left behind him by a poet of diviner birth than he. The giant's strength which it was excellent to have it was tyrannous to use, as too often he was wont to use it, so cruelly too much like a giant. Not that any one will now take very great exception to the execution done on statesmen such as Shaftesbury or as Buckingham, on singers such as Settle or as Blackmore. But it must be surely at the peril of our conscience if we condone such actions as the commission of those foul and savage political epilogues too justly stigmatized by Lord Macaulay.

And yet, again, how little must these weigh in the final scale of judgment, overloaded as it is and swayed down by the weight of his massive laurels! Among his forefathers and successors of the giant brood, Jonson has excelled him in weighty wealth and Byron has equalled him in spontaneous versatility of genius; but Dryden at his best is a surer workman of a trustier hand than either. And however unequal in his lyric touch, he has been but comparatively overpraised for the consummate force and swift felicity of his labours in the middle region of that line. He is the undisputed lord of lyrical rhetoric: he wins his way and makes his points with the easy and mighty touch of a sovereign orator. All the great effects of eloquence are his to command at the slightest wave of his hand in summons: all these, and something more, which is part of his indefinable birthright as a poet. Very few poets have had any mentionable measure of the gifts most proper and most requisite to the art of noble oratory,

which all were his alike in such fruitful and imperial affluence; though many have had more of those which are more especially proper to their art, and to that art alone. To sum up, we may revert to the distinction already drawn between the Olympian and Titanic orders of men. There was little enough of the godlike in Dryden's composition; but, once more, what a man was this giant, and what a giant was this man!

Politics, it may seem to us, were but too liable to become or to appear in the life of Dryden what literature was in the life of Mirabeau; if not an accidental and unnatural episode, yet a somewhat unworthy and sometimes an unclean diversion. In the bright though not blameless career of the successor to his throne there was no such admixture or interference of improper or alien preoccupation. No man ever saw his life's way more clearly or accepted the conditions of his life's work with more of rational manfulness than Pope. He had a most healthy and liberal interest in other men's lines of life, a most cordial and virile content and satisfaction with his own. He was a good and true patriot after and perhaps beyond the fashion of his age; and whether his perceptions in ethics and philosophy were deep or shallow, his devotion to the principle of either study was not in any case the less genuine and respectable. Of his personal character it is nothing to say that he had the courage of a lion: for a beast's or an athlete's courage must have something of physical force to back it, something of a body to base itself upon: and the spirit which was in Pope, we might say, was almost as good as bodiless. And what a spirit it was! how fiery bright and dauntless! We are invited, and not always

unreasonably, to condone or palliate much that was unworthy of manhood in Byron, on just and compassionate consideration of the bitter burden attached to his bodily and daily life; but what was his trial and what was his courage to Pope's? how less than little the one, how less than nothing the other! For Byron we should have charity and sympathy: but it rouses the blood, it kindles the heart, to remember what an indomitable force of heroic spirit, and sleepless always as fire, was inclosed in the pitiful body of the misshapen weakling whose whole life was spent in fighting the good fight of sense against folly, of light against darkness, of human speech against brute silence, of truth and reason and manhood against all the banded bestialities of all dunces and all dastards, all blackguardly blockheads and all blockheaded blackguards, who then as now were misbegotten by malignity on dullness. We are easily tempted and naturally apt to set against the high qualities of such warriors on the side of all men worthy of their help, by way of counterpoise to their glory and subtraction from our own debt of gratitude and esteem, the fierceness of their habitual mood and the foulness of their occasional missiles. We are less apt, possibly, to remember the conditions of their life-long fight. In an age to which personality and slander, the brutalities of calumny and the mendacities of malice, are as happily as undeniably unknown, it is inevitably difficult for us to realize a state of literary society in which every blockhead who might also be a blackguard had free vent for his filthiest insolence—in which every liar who might also be a coward felt it safe to steal a stranger's name as a relief to the obscurity of his own

or a shelter for the infamy of his act. It is not more incredible than true that the condition of letters in England was once such as to enable a dastardly and dirty rascal to issue, under the thievish cover of a lying name, a dirty and dastardly libel on three men no less known and honoured, then as now, than Pope, Arbuthnot, and Gay; a libel based on the admitted fact of their mutual friendship and reciprocal sympathy in unenvious admiration of each other's native genius and natural good work. Nothing, not even the hateful perception of an intolerable superior, would seem ever to exasperate the envious man so much as the absence—the undeniable and obvious absence—of this vilest among all vile qualities from the mental composition of his betters. That foulest and shamefullest of all the seven deadly sins, that vice to which all other vices save cowardice its parent and lying its child are virtues, had then, in at least one loathsome incarnation, so much of a coward's courage as to skulk forth into the twilight of print with but the fig-leaf of a pseudonym patched or pinned over its nakedness. It cannot be denied that there are signs of moral progress in the world of letters, unless it can be denied that such a thing as is now open before my eyes while I write this sentence—a farce or dramatic satire called *The Confederates*, published under a false name by a poetaster of the period—could not now, for very dread of the ineffaceable ignominy which would follow on the inevitable detection of a lie so abject in its motive and its method, its end and its means alike, be shuffled into shameful print by the boldest coward in all the viperous generation of literary liars. Nor is it less certain—or uncertain—that in no other age could a

rival commentator on the text of Shakespeare have earned his exaltation or degradation to the curule chair of Dullness hard by the whipping-post of ribalds, to which as a blackguard he might deserve to be attached, or on which as a blockhead he might deserve to be enthroned.

But, extinct as they may or as they may not be now, it is indisputable that such noisome and unmentionable vermin were daily and nightly 'about the path and about the bed' of the great and gallant man who embalmed the types of them for all time in the black-spotted and ill-savoured amber of the *Dunciad*. And it was inevitable that the unseemly accident of their 'villainous company' or controversy should exasperate as with infectious virulence the habit of mind which physical infirmity or deformity is proverbially liable to engender. Pope was by nature undeniably 'malin comme un bossu'—no more and no less: for he surely was not malignant or malevolent; but as surely the untranslatable French epithet hits off the nature of his quality to a hair. He was sharp, sly, and little prone to pity where pity was little deserved; but I agree with Mr. W. M. Rossetti[1] in recognising the manful kindness, however crossed with a dash of no acrid or unkindly raillery, to which his prologue for the benefit-night of 'poor old John Dennis' bears gracious and ample witness. Nor can I think that ''twere to consider too curiously, to consider' that the temperament of his ill-conditioned body rather than the temper of his imprisoned mind must be held responsible for the childish trickery and apish furtiveness of such intrigues as have been so sharply cast in his teeth by the successive severity

[1] *Lives of Famous Poets*, p. 131.

of the three Anglican clergymen who have edited and defamed him as poet or as man. After the Reverend Mr. Warton came the Reverend Mr. Bowles, and after the Reverend Mr. Bowles comes the Reverend Mr. Elwin. 'Hear them! All these against one foreigner!' cries Mr. Browning's Luria; and 'See them! All these against one Liberal Catholic!' a lay student may be tempted and permitted to exclaim at sight of so many cassocked commentators opening in full cry upon the trail of this poet. And such a feeling may be indulged without any very sympathetic admiration for the balanced attitude of Pope between a modified sort of conformity and a moderate kind of philosophy. On such matters, if the weightier opinion of men worthier to pronounce on them than I would permit me to entertain an opinion, I should guess that Pope, who certainly was rather conformable than orthodox, was also rather a loose thinker than a free thinker. But however this may be, there is something in the man which would seem to provoke an inevitable shaking of clenched surplices in the face of his memory at every resurgence of his name. It is more painful for men who on the whole are inclined to admire his dauntless nature as highly as his matchless genius—for matched on his own ground he never has been or can be—to find that a judge so different as is Mr. Leslie Stephen from such clerical critics as we have named can permit himself to say of Pope, in the course of a generally admirable estimate, 'He was—if we must speak bluntly—' (but I venture to think we must not speak so bluntly of such a man) 'a liar and a hypocrite.' A liar, yes: a hypocrite, no. He carried perhaps further than most men of the

world the conventional privilege of social double-dealing: he did not always show the same face to the same person: he certainly was not so careful as a very few men are, and as it seems to me that a man of perfect and blameless honour should always aim at being, to speak of men absent, friends or enemies, no whit otherwise than he would like them, if chance should so bring it about, to know that he had spoken. But surely there was nothing of what we usually call the hypocrite—nothing essentially unpardonable or radically dishonourable—in a man not only so nobly fearless but so faithfully affectionate that even the great and terrible Swift recognized in him a capacity for enduring love and sorrowing fidelity to the remembrance of a dead friend, at least fourfold as great as that of the man who might come nearest to him in faithfulness of affection. This does not, of course, disprove the imputation of unmanly and unfriendly advantage taken of this very friend's helpless and piteous infirmity; it does not refute the only less grave charge of indelicate and unchivalrous conduct with regard to women; it hardly extenuates what seems equally inexplicable and inexcusable in the singular and scandalous intrigue woven and unwoven by his own device about the publication of his correspondence. But it does, I think,—or at least it should—very seriously temper and tone down our judgment on all these heads. Mr. Leslie Stephen has indicated, with equally faultless instinct and fearless intelligence, the fact which even yet may seem something of a paradox, and which in other days would hardly have found utterance or hoped to find a hearing—that, 'though nominally the poet of reason,' when he failed most gravely as

a writer or erred most gravely as a man, he erred mainly if not merely through excess of irrational impulse. For those of course must be accounted the gravest failures of a great writer, which are made in his own proper field. Pope's lyrical collapse and pastoral imbecility need not be weighed at the weight of a feather or the worth of a straw against the worth and weight of his claims as a great writer and an admirable poet. Such matters are as much out of the question as they are now beyond and below the cognizance of serious criticism. But his faults as a moralist or a satirist, an ethical or a philosophic poet, are as clearly as ever were the faults of Byron or of Burns the natural and unavoidable errors of a temperament or an intellect in which instinct or impulse had practically the upper hand of principle and of reason. The instincts of a deformed invalid, with a bitter wit and most irritable nerves, are of course more likely than the impulses of a strong man, with healthy blood and hot passions, to seem rather intellectual than physical energies or infirmities; yet in Pope's case the body was perhaps as liable to misguide the mind, and emotion to get the start of reflection, as in the case of any hot-brained lyrist—or even of any brainless athlete. Anger, if not malice also in many cases, is surely after all no less properly definable as a sensual passion than lust or gluttony.

The personal or the literary relations of a man whose genius is constrained to work under such hard and strange conditions must always be difficult for justice to determine and charity to define. But the most delicate and dubious point in the matter is that raised by the unavoidable question of his relations

towards the stronger sex. The author of a satire on women which is perhaps as much comparatively overrated by Mr. Rossetti[1] as it was depreciated with absurd and irrelevant virulence by De Quincey cannot possibly be treated by sane or careful criticism as though he were with regard to women even such another as Dryden; who, to speak bluntly in my turn, seems to have seen little or nothing but a propagating machine, an ingenious and commodious engine for securing the continuance of the race, in the sex which has given the final and crowning proof of its unquestionable superiority in strength by its truly preternatural success in persuading the weaker half of humanity to call and perhaps to believe itself the stronger. The constitutional monarchy of man, who from the cradle to the grave is doomed to realize that pitiful ideal of a half royal house—to reign and not to govern, bears surely in every stage of its precarious and transparent imposture the plainest witness that could be borne, pays surely at each fresh demand or imposition the fullest tribute that could be paid, to the radically imperial or the imperially radical autocracy of that only higher power which neither atheist nor republican at his peril may deny. Only men of the type of Dryden, in whom it is hard to detect a third component beyond the nobly or ignobly animal and intellectual, can avoid the duty levied by nature of paying any graver tax than the exaction of a transient and merely sensual submission to feminine influence. Of such influence there is practically no trace for evil or for good in the life and the work of Dryden. His poetry was not more shaped or

[1] *Lives of Famous Poets*, p. 128.

coloured by the patronage of 'her graceless Grace' of Cleveland—the virtuous woman who was, if not exactly a crown, yet undeniably a coronet to her husband—than by the 'not inelegant amusement,' as Sir Walter Scott very judiciously describes it, of eating tarts in the surely less disreputable company of 'Madam Reeve' the actress. For aught we can see, apart from physical or social necessities, Dryden could as easily have dispensed with women as he would readily have dispensed with priests. To Pope the influence at any rate of female friendship was at least as indispensable as of male ; and without friendship, be it said to his credit and his honour, he could not apparently have lived or cared to live. In his writings the presence and the potency of feminine sympathies or antipathies can no more be overlooked by any student than can their absence or their effacement from the writings of Dryden ; who on this point is comparable with Jonson alone among the other ungodlike giants of our poetry. But against the beautiful tenderness and half divine devotion of Pope's verses on the latter years of the beloved and venerable mother whose name he has made for all time sweet and dear to the memory of all his readers must undoubtedly be set the unfragrant recollection of his virulent and viperous aspersions on the name and fame of other women. But, again, the fresh question arises, what manner of women were these ? Surely not all privileges at once and all immunities are always altogether to be conceded to all women alike. Pope was undoubtedly a man who now and then was wont to lay his hand upon a woman far otherwise than in the way of kindness ; yet we certainly cannot regard him as liable to the

famous imputation conveyed in Tobin's ridiculous triplet. Whatever esteem we may feel for the talents and merits, whatever toleration we may be inclined to extend over the eccentricities and audacities, of such women as Lady Mary Wortley Montague, it is the rankest and most nauseous cant of hypocritical chivalry to pretend that they have a right to expect the same tender and reverent forbearance which all but the vilest of men and scribblers feel for 'any woman, womanly.' Were it not that few men and no women seem generally able to realize the value and the meaning of the homely truth that you cannot eat your cake and have it, it would plainly be more than superfluous to insist on the consequent and cognate fact that the stronger sex is no more qualified than is the weaker to claim all the privileges of the other and retain possession of all its own. No reasoning and feeling thinker of either sex will seriously affirm that the actual conditions of legal and social relation between the sexes are by any manner of means unimprovably perfect, unimpeachably righteous, ideally equitable in adjustment of rights and avoidance of wrongs. But no sane adult of the normal human type in mind and body will admit or will imagine that a woman who arrogates and attains the place and the license reserved by nature or by custom, by tradition or by law, for men alone in general, can exact or expect from men any more of chivalrous or delicate deference than man extends to man. And if, in an age of free speech and foul language, such a woman takes to the diversion of throwing mud at her superiors, she can as little expect to keep her face from the retorted splash of a heavier pellet than her own as to keep her fingers

clean enough to be fit for the homage of any but a scavenger's salute.

In his two famous poems which deal for once wholly with the tragic side of female passion, I cannot and could never think that Pope succeeds in touching the key-note of genuine pathos. The opening lines of his *Elegy on an Unfortunate Lady* are as incomparably inferior to the majestic and magnificent first verses of the poem from which he borrowed the suggestion of this overture as the sequel and the close of his own are immeasurably superior in force and harmony of effect to those of his precursor's elegy.[1] And for all its elaborate excellence of construction the epistle of Eloisa seems in my humble opinion open to three several objections of equal if of no great weight. The full capabilities of the subject are not thoroughly grasped and utilized; while its main difficulty is neither evaded nor surmounted. In one famous and pretentiously pathetic line, which I prefer to quote only as Latinized with exquisite success by Landor,[2] the mourner is made, while attempting to reach the very zenith of tragic tenderness, to touch the very nadir of ludicrous indecency in the expression of a request which no man, I should think, could read with-

[1] On the chance that not all readers of this page may remember the superb four lines which open Ben Jonson's elegy on that Marchioness of Winchester who had likewise the yet higher honour to be lamented by Milton in a poem yet more unequal and uncertain in its loveliness than that of the elder poet, I will here transcribe them.

> 'What gentle ghost, besprent with April dew,
> Hails me so solemnly to yonder yew,
> And beckoning woos me, from the fatal tree
> To pluck a garland for herself or me?'

Si sic omnia dixisset—! Where would Pope's elegy be then?

[2] Da quod potes, quod non potes Morpheus dabit.

out laughter, and few women, I should hope, without a blush. What is good and genuine in these poems is of the same quality as what is best and most genuine in the *Essay on Man*. But this, I need not say, is of no mean quality. If to be pathetic were no more than to be impressive, to be passionate no more than to be eloquent, these elegiac effusions or rather compositions would undoubtedly be passionate and pathetic. But if not, they assuredly are neither.

To Pope as to Dryden the general instinct of criticism has hardly been unjust, which fixes in either case upon some few detached passages as samples or as tests of their genius at its highest rather than on any whole single poem or class of poems. For it is not usually of the *Essay on Man* or the *Religio Laici*, full as these poems are of grave and careful excellence, that we all think at once when we think of Charles the Second's poet laureate or Queen Anne's poet regent. It is not of *The Hind and the Panther*, opulent and superb in august eloquence and passionate humour as is that unrivalled masterpiece of polemical poetry ; perhaps it is hardly even of *The Rape of the Lock*, blameless in its beauty and perfect in its charm as is that sovereign flower of social satire. Achitophel and Zimri, Atticus and Atossa, Doeg and Og, Sporus and Bufo, rise first and clearest on our recollection, weigh last and heaviest in our judgment. As long as these great and splendid studies are familiar to all students of English literature,—in other words, as long as English literature may hope to find students at all—men different in temper and tone of mind, if equally rational and capable, will agree to differ in their preference of one master to the other. My own verdict, as

may probably be evident enough, would stand unhesitatingly and emphatically in favour of the elder. But I must have failed indeed of my purpose if it is not now equally evident that few if any can rate higher or relish more keenly the faultless and peerless accomplishment of his more fortunate successor. Whatever Pope has left us is 'as round and smooth as Giotto's O'; whatever Dryden has left us is liable to come short of this especial and surely precious praise. The strength of Dryden never wholly fails him; but the skill of Pope never fails him at all. He is none of the greater gods; but he is at least, in Massinger's phrase, a 'godling'; or a libellous parasite of his own day might have likened him, in Shakespeare's phrase, to 'that giant dwarf,' the cunning sharpshooter of Olympus. As humourist rather than as poet, Pope is to Dryden what Sheridan is to Congreve; less deep, less rich, less naturally strong of hand; more considerate, more cautious, more 'obvious' if not 'obtrusive,' in the method of his workmanship and the presentation of his talent. But Congreve on the whole must be ranked far higher above Sheridan than Dryden can properly be ranked above Pope.

Beneath or beside these two great dominant names of the age ensuing on the Restoration, three others may be ranked as only less representative and memorable in the dynasty of our humorous and satirical and social poets: 'Butler and his godson Swift,' as Landor classes them, and thirdly a name of sweeter though less serious associations than either of these—the best and brightest poet of society that ever England or France or Italy produced and enjoyed—the incomparable and inimitable Prior. Never was the parable of the talents more

curiously reversed or inverted than in the case of these three humourists. The ten talents for humorous poetry which were cast into the crucible of *Hudibras* resulted in an amalgam so formless, incomposite, and unwieldy, that it has to be broken up again into detached ingots of gold before we can put to any reasonable service the precious ore of its marvellous material. Butler lives only and could never live really but in fragments; the weight and worth of his nuggets, their splendour and solidity, impress us with most wonder and inspire us with most delight when detached from the blocks of shapeless and inharmonious burlesque in which they lie imbedded and entombed. The forces of wisdom, thought, perception, and feeling which make massive and precious alike the verse and the prose of Butler can best be estimated and enjoyed (if I may speak for others according to my own experience) by separate handling and several examination of such samples or excerpts as a reader may select for himself or accept from others. And to know Swift it would of course be superfluous to say that we must turn first and return last to his prose; that even such matchless masterpieces as *Hamilton's Bawn* and *Mary the Cookmaid's Letter* are to the *Tale of a Tub* as underwood to forest. But Prior, so much less in stature than either of these giants, is almost as much more satisfactory, more delightful, more praiseworthy and thankworthy in poetic accomplishment. What he has done may not be great, but the best of it is nothing less than divinely good. His love-letter to a lady of quality, aged five, will for ever enrapture all readers who can feel in its gayer or its graver aspect the inexpressible charm of children. To me at least this one seems the most adorable of nursery idyls that ever was or will be in our

language; nay, not unworthy of a corner among the lighter outbuildings or antechambers in that supreme lyrical palace of infantile poetry, *L'Art d'être Grand-père* itself. The poetry of wit and intelligence, 'not uninformed with' fine indignation and cordial love of country, never bore a more brilliant flower fenced round with more pungent thorns than his inversion or conversion of Boileau's wretched ode on the siege of Namur into a two-edged sword wherewith to transfix at once the parasitic poetaster and his puffed-out patron on the very sharpest point of scornful song. Had Louis been encumbered with sense enough to read and troubled with wit enough to feel it, Prior might have been forgiven if he had shared the less reasonable apprehension of John Dennis as to the personal resentment and probable reprisals of the sun-king. If his elaborate 'Solomon in rhyme' was an assured and inevitable failure, yet all the world has by heart one charming couplet of it; and this is more than can be said of many a poem even splendidly successful in its day. The bright light pinnace of *Alma* rides far more gracefully at anchor, invites and rewards more passengers or traffickers to come aboard her, than the deep-drawing argosy of *Hudibras*, wellnigh waterlogged after the first rich cruise. As for the tales and epigrams, though I can scarcely agree with the Great Lexicographer that in consequence or in spite of them 'Prior is a lady's book,' yet I must think that where other such epigrammatists and tale-tellers—always excepting the dearly beloved name of La Fontaine, and by no means excepting the quaintly incongruous name of Byron's favourite Casti—give us an ounce of wit to a pound of dirt, Prior gives us at least a pound of good fresh humour for every ounce of a more questionable

ingredient. But perhaps the surest proof as well as the sharpest trial of Prior's exquisite and triumphant excellence is the comparison of his achievements and accomplishments with that of all his many and emulous disciples or followers in the same line. As surely as before him there was none like him, so surely has no one been like him since. And men well worthy of grateful record and gracious remembrance are to be found on the roll of his pupils, from past generations even onwards to our own. But he is hardly more above the Sedleys and Dorsets who preceded than the Luttrells and Praeds who succeeded him. Praed indeed at his best is thoroughly charming and faultless in his own pleasant line—well worthy of his place in the milky way of minor poets; but at this best he is as it were the ideal flower of clever and well-bred boys, the typically triumphant 'Etonian,' without enough poetic ballast to endanger the steerage of his outrigger: Prior to him is as a man to a schoolboy.

To find a match for our head master of social song we must pass out of England, and rise to the recollection of even so great a rival as Voltaire. Mr. Carlyle has done no more than justice—a justice which from the Proclus or Plotinus of Neo-Calvinism is not less commendable than surprising—to those 'Madrigals which are really incomparable in their kind; not equalled in graceful felicity even by Goethe, and by him alone of Poets approached in that respect.'[1] But, be it said with

[1] Carlyle's *History of Frederick the Great*, book xiv. chap. vi. (vol. iii. p. 717, ed. 1862). Having occasion to refer to Mr. Carlyle's great prose epic or historic poem, I am tempted to add here an illustrative note on a curious if also an insignificant point. Perhaps one or two other idle

leave of our most illustrious Musophobist, they are equalled at their best if not excelled in that especial quality by the choicest home-bred verse of Matthew Prior.[1]

students or amateurs of historical or literary *bricabracquologie* (as Balzac would have called it) may be as much amused as I was by the discovery for which I claim so much of credit as is not due rather to sheer accident, that the farce acted at Sceaux, on Thursday, August 24, 1747, before the Duchesse du Maine, was simply a translation or adaptation of the better part of Vanbrugh's *Relapse*—that is, of those scenes which belong to the legitimate domain of pure and broad comedy. 'What a pity none of us has read this fine Farce!' ejaculated in 1864 the sardonic historian (book xvi. chap. ii. vol. iv. p. 262). But in the spring of that year the present writer had the inestimable benefit of so doing, in a newly published volume of complementary or supplementary additions to the yet insufficiently voluminous writings of Voltaire; and had consequently the further advantage of verifying the accuracy of a surmise which could hardly have failed to suggest itself to any lover of the English drama—that Voltaire's 'Mademoiselle de la Cochonnière,' acted by the translatress of Newton at the girlish age of forty-one, was none other than Miss Hoyden, and 'Madame Dufaur as *Barbe* (Governess Barbara)' the representative of that ideally delightful Nurse who alone is worthy to claim kinship with Juliet's in time past, and (may I dare to say it?) even almost, perhaps, with the incomparable and adorable Mrs. Gamp in ages yet to be. *In tenui labor —at tenuis labor ipse.*

[1] I am curious to know what to avow that I do not may be a confession of strange ignorance—whether there exists any edition of Prior including the two early satires mentioned and quoted in the notes to Malone's Life of Dryden (pp. 519, 544-5) as containing each a virulent attack, there cited at length in its place, on the elder and greater poet. The cautious and laborious accuracy of Malone was as justly, I believe, proverbial among students in his day as is that of Dr. Grosart in our own; but it would surely be a relief to all grateful and sympathetic readers if Prior's memory could likewise be relieved from the burden and the brand of so scandalous an imputation as this of anonymous and rancorous onslaught on the glorious grey hairs of Dryden. *The Town and Country Mouse* may be pardonable or excusable as an ebullition of juvenile humour, not over gracious or graceful, but perhaps hardly to be called virulent or malignant; no such apology could extenuate the offence of so gross an outrage conveyed in such vile verses as we find laid to his account on the usually impeccable authority of Malone.

CONGREVE.

WILLIAM CONGREVE, the greatest English master of pure comedy, was born, according to the latest and likeliest accounts, in 1670, according to the inscription on his monument, in 1672; and whether in England or in Ireland, at Bardsey near Leeds or at some place unknown beyond St. George's Channel, has likewise been matter of doubt and dispute; but we may presumably accept the authority of Lord Macaulay, who decides against Dr. Johnson in favour of the later date, and dismisses without notice the tradition of an Irish birthplace. To Ireland, at all events, is due the credit of his education,—as a schoolboy at Kilkenny, as an undergraduate at Dublin. From college he came to London, and was entered as a student of law at the Middle Temple.

The first-fruits of his studies appeared under the boyish pseudonym of 'Cleophil,' in the form of a novel whose existence is now remembered only through the unabashed avowal of so austere a moralist as Dr. Johnson, that he 'would rather praise it than read it.' In 1693 Congreve's real career began, and early enough by the latest computation, with the brilliant appearance and instant success of his first comedy, *The Old Bachelor*, under the generous auspices of Dryden, then as ever a living and immortal witness to the falsehood of the

vulgar charge which taxes the greater among poets with jealousy or envy, the natural badge and brand of the smallest that would claim a place among their kind The discrowned laureate had never, he said, seen such a first play ; and indeed the graceless grace of the dialogue was as yet only to be matched by the last and best work of Etherege, standing as till then it had done alone among the barefaced brutalities of Wycherley and Shadwell. The types of Congreve's first work were the common conventional properties of stage tradition ; but the fine and clear-cut style in which these types were reproduced was his own. The gift of one place and the reversion of another were the solid fruits of his splendid success. Next year a better play from the same hand met with worse fortune on the stage, and with yet higher honour from the first living poet of his nation. The noble verses, as faultless in the expression as reckless in the extravagance of their applause, prefixed by Dryden to *The Double Dealer*, must naturally have supported the younger poet, if indeed such support can have been required, against the momentary annoyance of assailants whose passing clamour left uninjured and secure the fame of his second comedy ; for the following year witnessed the crowning triumph of his art and life, in the appearance of *Love for Love.* Two years later his ambition rather than his genius adventured on the foreign ground of tragedy, and *The Mourning Bride* began such a long career of good fortune as in earlier or later times would have been closed against a far better work. Next year he attempted, without his usual success, a reply to the attack of Jeremy Collier, the nonjuror, 'on the immorality and profaneness of the

English stage'—an attack for once not discreditable to the assailant, whose honesty and courage were evident enough to approve him incapable alike of the ignominious precaution which might have suppressed his own name, and of the dastardly mendacity which would have stolen the mask of a stranger's. Against this merit must be set the mistake of confounding in one indiscriminate indictment the levities of a writer like Congreve with the brutalities of a writer like Wycherley; an error which ever since has more or less perverted the judgment of succeeding critics. The general case of comedy was then, however, as untenable by the argument as indefensible by the sarcasm of its most brilliant and comparatively blameless champion. Art itself, more than anything else, had been outraged and degraded by the recent school of the Restoration; and the comic work of Congreve, though different rather in kind than in degree from the bestial and blatant license of his immediate precursors, was inevitably for a time involved in the sentence passed upon the comic work of men in all ways alike his inferiors. The true and triumphant answer to all possible attacks of honest men or liars, brave men or cowards, was then as ever to be given by the production of work unarraignable alike by fair means or foul, by frank impeachment or by furtive imputation. In 1700 Congreve thus replied to Collier with the crowning work of his genius—the unequalled and unapproached masterpiece of English comedy. The one play in our language which may fairly claim a place beside or but just beneath the mightiest work of Molière is *The Way of the World*. On the stage which had recently acclaimed with uncritical applause the

author's more questionable appearance in the field of tragedy, this final and flawless evidence of his incomparable powers met with a rejection then and ever since inexplicable on any ground of conjecture. During the twenty-eight years which remained to him, Congreve produced little beyond a volume of fugitive verses, published ten years after the miscarriage of his masterpiece. His even course of good fortune under Whig and Tory Governments alike was counterweighed by the physical infirmities of gout and failing sight. He died, January 29, 1729, in consequence of an injury received on a journey to Bath by the upsetting of his carriage; was buried in Westminster Abbey, after lying in state in the Jerusalem Chamber; and bequeathed the bulk of his fortune to the chief friend of his last years, Henrietta Duchess of Marlborough, daughter of the great duke, rather than to his family, which, according to Johnson, was then in difficulties, or to Mrs. Bracegirdle the actress, with whom he had lived longer on intimate terms than with any other mistress or friend, but who inherited by his will only 200*l.* The one memorable incident of his later life was the visit of Voltaire, whom he astonished and repelled by his rejection of proffered praise and the expression of his wish to be considered merely as any other gentleman of no literary fame. The great master of wellnigh every province in the empire of letters, except the only one in which his host reigned supreme, replied that in that sad case Congreve would not have received his visit.

The fame of our greatest comic dramatist is founded wholly or mainly on but three of his five plays. His first comedy was little more than a brilliant study after

such models as were eclipsed by this earliest effort of their imitator; and tragedy under his hands appears rouged and wrinkled, in the patches and powder of Lady Wishfort. But his three great comedies are more than enough to sustain a reputation as durable as our language. Were it not for these we should have no samples to show of comedy in its purest and highest form. Ben Jonson, who alone attempted to introduce it by way of reform among the mixed work of a time when comedy and tragedy were as inextricably blended on the stage as in actual life, failed to give the requisite ease and the indispensable grace of comic life and movement to the action and passion of his elaborate and magnificent work. Of Congreve's immediate predecessors, whose aim had been to raise on French foundations a new English fabric of simple and unmixed comedy, Wycherley was of too base metal and Etherege was of metal too light to be weighed against him; and besides theirs no other or finer coin was current than the crude British ore of Shadwell's brutal and burly talent. Borrowing a metaphor from Landor, we may say that a limb of Molière would have sufficed to make a Congreve, a limb of Congreve would have sufficed to make a Sheridan. The broad and robust humour of Vanbrugh's admirable comedies gives him a place on the master's right hand; on the left stands Farquhar, whose bright light genius is to Congreve's as female is to male, or 'as moonlight unto sunlight.' No English writer, on the whole, has so nearly touched the skirts of Molière; but his splendid intelligence is wanting in the deepest and subtlest quality which has won for Molière from the greatest poet of his country and our age the

tribute of exact and final definition conveyed in that perfect phrase which salutes at once and denotes him—'ce moqueur pensif comme un apôtre.' Only perhaps in a single part has Congreve half consciously touched a note of almost tragic depth and suggestion; there is something wellnigh akin to the grotesque and piteous figure of Arnolphe himself in the unvenerable old age of Lady Wishfort, set off and relieved as it is, with grace and art worthy of the supreme French master, against the only figure on any stage which need not shun comparison even with that of Célimène.

COLLINS.

In the reaction against that sweeping violence of indiscriminative depreciation with which the school of poets and critics usually registered as Wordsworthian, but actually founded at midnight by William Blake and fortified at sunrise by William Wordsworth, was wont for some half a century to overwhelm the poetry and criticism of the century preceding, the name which of all properly belonging to that period has incomparably the most valid and solid claim to the especial and essential praise that denotes a poet from among other men of genius has hardly yet taken by general consent the place which is unquestionably its due. Even in his own age it was the fatally foolish and uncritical fashion to couple the name of Collins with that of Gray, as though they were poets of the same order or kind. As an elegiac poet, Gray holds for all ages to come his unassailable and sovereign station; as a lyric poet, he is simply unworthy to sit at the feet of Collins. Whether it may not be a greater thing than ever was done by the greater lyrist, to have written a poem of such high perfection and such universal appeal to the tenderest and the noblest depths of human feeling as Gray's *Elegy*, is of course another and a wholly irrelevant question. But it is not a question which admits of debate at all, among men

qualified to speak on such matters, that as a lyric poet Gray was not worthy to unloose the latchets of his shoes. The fanfaronnade and falsetto which impair the always rhetorically elaborate and sometimes genuinely sonorous notes of Gray were all but impossible to the finer touch of his precursor. In the little book of odes which dropped, a still-born immortal, from the press, and was finally burnt up even to the last procurable copy by the hands of its author in a fever-fit of angry despair, there was hardly a single false note ; and there were not many less than sweet or strong. There was, above all things, a purity of music, a clarity of style, to which I know of no parallel in English verse from the death of Andrew Marvell to the birth of William Blake. Here, in the twilight which followed on the splendid sunset of Pope, was at last a poet who was content to sing out what he had in him—to sing and not to say, without a glimpse of wit or a flash of eloquence. These two valuable and admirable superfluities had for generations been regarded, not as fortuitous accessories, but as indispensable requisites, to poetic genius. Nothing so clearly shows how much finer a sense of poetry than is usually attributed to him lay radically latent, when unobscured by theories or prepossessions, in the deliberate judgment of Dr. Johnson, as his recognition in Collins of the eminent and exquisite faculty which he rightly refused to recognize in Gray. The strong-lunged and heavy-handed preacher of *The Vanity of Human Wishes* had an ear fine enough at least to distinguish the born lyric poet from him who had been made one, though self-made. His recognition of Collins had been ready and generous in his youth ; it was faithful and consistent in his old

age. And in both seasons he stood then, almost as he stands now, alone in the insight of his perception and the courage of his loyalty. For it needed some courage as well as some openness of mind and sureness of instinct to acknowledge as well as to appreciate a quality of merit far more alien than was the quality of Gray's best work to the merit of Pope and his scholars; among whose ranks the critic himself stood so honourably high as an ethic poet.

Strange as the paradox may sound, it must yet once again be repeated, that the first indispensable faculty of a singer is ability to sing. There was but one man in the time of Collins who had in him a note of pure lyric song, a pulse of inborn music irresistible and indubitable; and that he was that man he could not open his lips without giving positive and instant proof. Poetry was his by birthright: to the very ablest of his compeers it was never more than a christening gift. The Muse gave birth to Collins; she did but give suck to Gray. In Goldsmith's verse, again, there is a gentle power of human emotion which lay for the most part quite out of our poet's way. His range of flight was perhaps the narrowest but assuredly the highest of his generation. He could not be taught singing like a finch: but he struck straight upward for the sun like a lark. Again, he had an incomparable and infallible eye for landscape; a purity, fidelity, and simple-seeming subtlety of tone, unapproached until the more fiery but not more luminous advent of Burns. Among all English poets he has, it seems to me, the closest affinity to our great contemporary school of French landscape-painters. Corot on canvas might have signed his *Ode*

to Evening; Millet might have given us some of his graver studies, and left them as he did no whit the less sweet for their softly austere and simply tender gravity. His magnificent Highland ode, so villainously defaced after his death by the most impudent interpolations on record, has much in it of Millais, and something also of Courbet when the simple genius of that star-crossed idoloclast was content with such noble and faithful use of freedom as he displayed in a picture of upland fell and tarnside copse in the curving hollow of a moor, which was once exhibited in London. Here and here only, for vigour of virile grasp and reach of possessive eye-sight, Burns himself was forestalled if not excelled. Here too is a visible power, duly and tenderly subdued into subordination, of command upon human emotion and homely sympathy, less intimate than in Burns and less profound than in Wordsworth, but none the less actual and vivid, which we hardly find elsewhere in this perfect painter of still life or starlit vision. In his artistic tenderness of conscience and scrupulous self-mastery of hand he so closely resembles Lord Tennyson as once at least to provoke the same doubtful sense of jealous and admiring demur. A notable instance of this refined excess in conscience is the exquisite recast of the originally exquisite second line in the *Ode to Evening*. But Collins may claim of us a far loftier note of praise than this: and it is one which could hardly have been sounded by the 'capacious mouth' of his good and true friend Johnson. He was the first English poet, after Milton's voice 'for the dwellers upon earth' fell silent, to blow again the clarion of republican faith and freedom: to reannounce with the passion of a lyric

and heroic rapture the divine right and the godlike duty of tyrannicide. And on this side of the summit of fair fame he stands loftily alone between the sunset of Milton and the sunrise of Landor. I hardly think there are much nobler verses in all English than those in which the new Alcæus, 'fancy-blest' indeed, has sung the myrtle-hidden sword that rid the sunlight of the first Pisistratid. For all her evil report among men on the score of passive obedience and regiculture, Oxford has now and then turned out—in a double sense, we might say, with reference to Shelley—sons who have loved the old cause as well as any reared by the nursing mother of Milton.

There is yet another memorable bond of communion which connects the fame of Collins with that of Milton in the past and with that of Shelley in the future. Between the elegy on Edward King and the elegy on John Keats came the humbler and softer note by which Collins set the seal of a gentle consecration on the grave of the 'Druid' Thomson; a note to be as gently echoed by Wordsworth in commemoration of his own sweeter song and sadder end.

The mention of Wordsworth's name reminds me of another but a casual coincidence between the fortunes of that great poet's work and of this his lyric and elegiac predecessor's. In both cases the generally accepted masterpiece of their lyric labour seems to me by no means the poem genuinely acceptable as such. Mr. Arnold, with the helpful loyalty and sound discretion of a wise disciple, has noted as much in the case of Wordsworth; it is no less demonstrable a truth in the case of

Collins. As surely as, for instance, the *Ode to Duty* is a work of greater perfection and more perfect greatness than that *On the Intimations of Immortality*, the *Ode on the Passions* is a work of less equal elevation and purity of excellence than, for example, is the *Ode to Evening*. Yet of course its grace and vigour, its vivid and pliant dexterity of touch, are worthy of all their inheritance of praise; and altogether it holds out admirably well to the happy and harmonious end; whereas the very *Ode to Liberty*, after an overture worthy of Milton's or of Handel's *Agonistes*, a prelude that peals as from beneath the triumphal hand of either of these demigods of music, steadily subsides through many noble but ever less and less noble verses, towards a final couplet showing not so much the flatness of failure as the prostration of collapse.

Living both in an age and after an age of critical poetry, Collins, always alien alike from the better and from the worse influences of his day, has shewn at least as plentiful a lack of critical instinct as ever did any poet on record, in his epistle to Hanmer on that worthy knight's 'inqualifiable' edition of Shakespeare. But his couplets, though incomparably inferior to Gray's, are generally spirited and competent as well as fluent and smooth.

The direct sincerity and purity of their positive and straightforward inspiration will always keep his poems fresh and sweet. He was a solitary song-bird among many more or less excellent pipers and pianists. He could put more spirit of colour into a single stroke, more breath of music into a single note, than could all the rest

of his generation into all the labours of their lives. And the memory of his name and the impression of his genius can only pass away with all relics and all records of lyric poetry in England.

(This brief notice was published in the third volume of Mr. Ward's Selections from the English Poets, side by side with the admirable study in which Mr. Matthew Arnold has so powerfully advocated the claim of Gray to a higher place among these poets than he is prepared to concede to Collins. 'Something of the like merit' is all that the most distinguished of living Wordsworthians will allow him : but I am fain to believe that the verdict of Wordsworth himself would have been given on the opposite side.)

WORDSWORTH AND BYRON.

AMONG the more eminent or prominent names of famous men, and perhaps especially of famous poets, some must inevitably be longer than others in finding their ultimate level of comparative account in critical no less than in popular repute. But it is singular enough at first sight that among all the many memorable names of our countrymen which ennoble for the retrospect of all time the first quarter of this century, two alone should still remain objects of so much debate as are those of the two poets who have recently supplied one of their most eminent successors with subject-matter for the exercise of his ability in discussion and the display of his daring in paradox. For although it has ever been my desire, in the expressive words of the Church Catechism, to order myself lowly and reverently to all my betters; and although I hope never to write a word incompatible with deep gratitude and cordial admiration for all the gifts of poetry and prose—to say nothing just now of admonition and castigation—which his too frequently offending countrymen owe to the just and liberal hand of Mr. Matthew Arnold; yet I cannot but feel that in his recent utterances or expositions regarding Wordsworth and Byron he has now and then spread a

wider sail before a stronger wind of sheer paradox than ever has any critic of anything like equal or comparable reputation. We might almost imagine, on consideration of the task here undertaken, that his aim had been to show how not gold only, but also the higher criticism, may solder close impossibilities, and make them kiss.

'Wordsworth and Byron,' says the most distinguished of Wordsworth's later disciples, 'stand out by themselves. When the year 1900 is turned, and our nation comes to recount her poetic glories in the century which has then just ended, the first names with her will be these.' I cannot, for my part, pretend to predict the issues of the future, to determine the progress or the aberration of opinion in days that perhaps we may not know of. But I must say that, if this prediction be prophecy indeed, the taste of 1901 will in my humble opinion be about on a par with the taste of 1647; when the first names of the Shakespearean generation were Jonson and Fletcher: Shakespeare, compared with these two claimants, being in the opinion of their most eminent disciples as 'dull' and 'scurrilous' a pretender as Mr. Arnold finds Coleridge and Shelley to be shadowy and inadequate competitors for fame with the laureates of Rydal and Ravenna.

It seems a great thing, and it certainly is something, to have such evidence as this to the fact that appreciation of Wordsworth is no longer incompatible with appreciation of Byron. On the other hand, certain as it is that the assertion of equality, and much more the suggestion of kinship, between these two contending forces of their generation would have exasperated the one into stormy jealousy less deep than the other's serene contempt, it is not less evident that the very fact and the very conscious-

ness of having so far surmounted the difficulties and harmonized the discords of the past may involve the critic in perplexities and lead him into temptations of his own. One of these, it seems to me, is the tendency to make too much at once of the salient points of likeness and of the salient points of contrast between two such men and leaders. Another is the tendency to exaggerate or to ignore or to mistake their actual relations to their own time and their possible influence on ours. That the direct or indirect influence of one will end only when there is not a man left in the world who understands a word of the dead English language; that the direct and indirect influence of the other, however much wider and more tangible while it lasted, is already in the main spent, exhausted, insignificant henceforward for better and for worse; it would appear an equal stretch of dogmatism to assert with equal confidence: yet it is an opinion for which a good deal might be said by any one with leisure and inclination to advance and support it by comparison of their respective claims.

Let me repeat, at the risk of appearing impertinently superfluous in protestation, that I have never written and never mean to write an irreverent word of Mr. Arnold's own claims to all due deference and all reasonable regard, whether as poet or as critic: but I must confess, borrowing two favourite terms of his own, that 'lucidity' does not appear to me by any means to be the distinguishing 'note' of his later criticisms. His first critical confession of faith—the famous and admirable if not exhaustive or conclusive preface of October 1, 1853—was a model of the quality which now, it should seem, appears to him rather commendable than practicable—

a matter of pious opinion or devout imagination. When we are told that the distinguishing merit of such poetry as we find in Keats's *Ode on a Grecian Urn* is that it gives us, of all gifts in the world, the expression of a moral idea comparable with the gravest and the deepest utterances of Shakespeare and of Milton, we begin to perceive, or at all events we begin to suspect, that Mr. Arnold's excursive studies in theology have somewhat infected him with the theologian's habit of using words and phrases in a special and extranatural sense which renders their message impervious, their meaning impenetrable, to all but the esoteric adept. 'A criticism of life' becomes such another term or form of speech as 'prevenient grace,' or 'the real presence,' or 'the double procession of the Holy Ghost:' if, Hamlet-like, we consider too curiously what it may mean, the reverent reader may haply find himself on the high road to distraction, the irreverent will too probably find himself on the verge of laughter. A certain criticism of life, a certain method or scheme of contemplation, a devotion to certain points of view and certain tones of thought, may unquestionably be discerned in the highest work of such poets as Milton, Wordsworth, and Shelley, in the past; in our own days, of such poets as Lord Tennyson, Mr. Browning, and Mr. Arnold himself. But how this fact can possibly be shown to imply that it is this quality which gives them rank as poets; and how the definition of this quality can possibly be strained so as to cover the case of Keats, the most exclusively æsthetic and the most absolutely non-moral of all serious writers on record; these are two questions to which the propounder of such postulates may surely be expected to vouchsafe

at least some gleam of a solution, some shadow of a reply. Meantime the apparent discrepancies (not to say, the transparent contradictions) involved in any such theory are thrown into sharp accidental relief by the comparison of Mr. Arnold's estimate of Gautier with his estimate of Keats. 'Such a poet as Théophile Gautier' is to him a type of the poet who has no criticism of life to offer, and who comes short of the poet's aim and the poet's crown in consequence of this deficiency; while the place of Keats among English poets is beside Shakespeare. Now Keats, in my opinion as well as in Mr. Arnold's, is a very decidedly greater poet than Gautier; but according to Mr. Arnold's theory, if his terms of definition are to be construed in any sense which may be 'understanded of the people,' I must venture to affirm that Gautier could be proved an incomparably greater poet than Keats. There is not a line extant by the author of *Endymion* which shows even a glimmer of such simple and cordial manliness of sympathy with the homely heroism and humble interest of actual life as informs every line of Gautier's noble little poem on two veteran survivors of the Old Guard, seen hobbling along the streets of contemporary Paris; a poem which combines in no small measure the best qualities of Wordsworth with the highest qualities of Byron.[1] And if it is not of actual life, its heroism and

[1] I must be allowed to submit that it is somewhat ungracious if not ungrateful in a professed Wordsworthian to select as a typical example of imperfection and failure the name of the one eminent French poet who has paid cordial and graceful tribute to the charm of Wordsworth, felt as from afar off in a single translated verse of

'ce poëte
Dont parle Lord Byron d'un ton si plein de fiel.'

its interest, its suffering and its action, with their good or evil influences and results in the noble or ignoble development of character—if it is not of this that Mr. Arnold means to speak when he defines the test of poetry, as of all other literature, to be its value as a criticism of life, I must confess, as a plain man who can only understand plain speaking,[1] that I really do not know how to construe his oracles.

Mr. Arnold has at once a passion and a genius for definitions. It is doubtless good to have such a genius, but it is surely dangerous to have such a passion. All sane men must be willing to concede the truth of an assertion which he seems to fling down as a challenge from the ethical critic to the æsthetic—that a school of poetry divorced from any moral idea is a school of poetry divorced from life. Even John Keats himself, except in his most hectic moments of sensuous or spiritual debility, would hardly, I should imagine, have undertaken to deny this. What may reasonably be maintained is a thesis very different from such a denial; namely, that a school of poetry subordinated to any school of doctrine, subjugated and shaped and utilized by any moral idea to the exclusion of native impulse and spiritual instinct, will produce work fit to live when the noblest specimens of humanity are produced by artificial incubation. However, when we come to consider the case of Byron, we must allow it to be wholly undeniable that some sort of claim to some other kind

[1] It may be that the avowal of this inability will be taken as proof that the level of the writer's intelligence is beneath that of Lord Lumpington and the Rev. Esau Hittall: but, if so, is it too rash to hope that Mr. Arnold may some day be induced for once to write criticism within reach of such understandings as those of his friend Mr. Bottles and myself?

of merit than that of a gift for writing poetry must be discovered or devised for him, if any place among memorable men is to be reserved for him at all. The fact that even his enormous vanity and inordinate egotism did not conceal this truth from him is perhaps the very best proof extant 'what a very clever fellow he was'—to borrow the words of the 'Letter from John Bull to Lord Byron' which appeared on the publication of the opening cantos of *Don Juan*; a letter so adroitly extravagant in its adulation that an 'ill-minded man' after study of Byron's correspondence and diary, might be tempted to assign it to the hand which penned them. But for that hand the trick would have been too delicate and dexterous—though assuredly not too pitiful and mean.

Before entering on the question, what criticism of life in any intelligible sense of the phrase may be derivable or deducible from the writings of Wordsworth or of Byron, I would venture to put forward, by no means a counter theory or a rival definition to Mr. Arnold's theory or definition of poetry, but a simple postulate, or at least a simple assumption, on which I would rest my argument. If it be not admitted, there is an end of the matter: it would be absolute waste of time, for one who assumes it as indisputable, to enter into controversy with one who regards it as disputable that the two primary and essential qualities of poetry are imagination and harmony: that where these qualities are wanting there can be no poetry, properly so called: and that where these qualities are perceptible in the highest degree, there, even though they should be unaccompanied and unsupported by any other great quality whatever—

even though the ethical or critical faculty should be conspicuous by its absence—there, and only there, is the best and highest poetry. Now it is obviously impossible to supply any profitable or serviceable definition of these terms. All writers on the subject, from Mr. Arnold himself down to the smallest perceptible Byronite or Wordsworthian that ever wagged a tail or pricked an ear in the 'common cry of' critics, are compelled sooner or later to give expression to their views and their conclusions with as much implicit dogmatism as Mr. John Dennis or Dr. Samuel Johnson. If any one chooses to assert that Flatman or Sprat or Byron had the secret of harmony, it would be as profitable an expenditure of time and reason to argue against his proposition as to contend with a musical critic who should maintain that *Orphée aux Enfers* was a more sublime example of sacred music than *Israel in Egypt*. Byron is as fit to be considered the rival of Coleridge and Shelley as Offenbach to be considered a competitor with Handel and Beethoven. In other matters than those in which Coleridge and Shelley were supreme; on ground where they could not set a trespassing foot without being at once convicted of comparative if not absolute incompetence; Byron was supreme in his turn—a king by truly divine right; but in a province outside the proper domain of absolute poetry. He is undisputed suzerain of the debateable borderland to which Berni has given his name: the style called Bernesque might now be more properly called Byronic, after the greater master who seized and held it by right of the stronger hand. If to be great as a Bernesque writer is to be great as a poet, then was Byron assuredly a great

poet: if it be not, then most assuredly he was nothing of the kind. On all other points, in all other capacities, he can only claim to be acknowledged as a poet of the third class who now and then rises into the second, but speedily relapses into the lower element where he was born. Nothing, I repeat, does so much credit to his intelligence as the fact that he should himself have seen this with more or less clearness: nothing does more discredit to his character than the effect produced by this consciousness on his bearing towards others, his contemporary superiors. Too clear-sighted—or his cleverness belies itself—not to know them for such, he was too vain, too envious, and too dishonest to acknowledge that he knew or even to abstain from denying it. And here we may not unprofitably observe the difference between the ever-itching vanity of such a writer as Byron and the candid pride of a great poet. When Dante Alighieri or William Shakespeare, when John Milton or when Victor Hugo may be pleased to speak as one not unconscious of his own greatness, such consciousness will be confounded with vanity by no man who does not bear as a birth-mark the sign of the tribe of Zoilus: it would show a certain degree of weakness and incompetence, if the greatest among men and writers should alone be doomed to share the incapacity of their meanest assailants to perceive or to acknowledge that they are not less than great. Far different from the high and haughty equity of such men's self-knowledge and self-reverence is the malevolent and cowardly self-conceit of a Byron, ever shuffling and swaggering and cringing and backbiting in a breath. The most remarkable point in his pretentious and restless egotism

is that a man capable of writing such bad verse should ever have been capable of seeing, even in part, how very bad it was; how very hollow were its claims; how very ignorant, impudent, and foolish, was the rabble rout of its adorers. That his first admirers in foreign countries were men of a far different order is a curious and significant truth which throws a double light upon the question in hand. The greatest European poet of his day, the greatest European patriot of our own, united in opinion perhaps on this one point only, have left eloquent and enduring testimony to the greatness of their ideal Byron. The enthusiasm of Goethe on the one hand and Mazzini on the other should be ample and final witness to the forcible and genuine impression made by the best work of Byron upon some of the highest minds in Europe. But in the former case we have first of all to consider this: what was the worth of Herr von Goethe's opinion on any question of extra-German literature? Of French he presumably knew at least as much as of English: and his criticism of French literature, if it can hardly be matter of 'argument for a week,' may certainly afford 'laughter for a month, and a good jest for ever.' He rebuked the French for their injustice to so great a poet as Dubartas; he would doubtless have rebuked the English for their neglect of so great a poet as Quarles. He discerned among the rising Frenchmen of 1830 one genius of pre-eminent promise, one youth in whom he might hail his destined successor in the curule chair of European letters: and this favoured son of Apollo was none other—si Musis placet!—than M. Prosper Mérimée. He might as rationally have remarked that England, in the age of Hume and Gibbon,

Collins and Gray, Fielding and Richardson, Johnson and Goldsmith, Chatterton and Sterne, had produced one writer of absolutely unparalleled merit—in the person of Mr. Horace Walpole.

Taking these considerations into due account, it is not without amusement as well as regret, it is not without regret as well as amusement, that we find even in our own day two English writers of such distinction as Mr. Matthew Arnold and Mr. John Nichol debating and discussing as a matter of no small interest and moment to Englishmen, what it was that Goethe really said and what it was that Goethe really meant to say about the proper place of Byron among English poets. 'No array of terms,' protests Walt Whitman, 'can say how much I am at peace about God, and about death:' and consequently he counsels mankind, 'Be not curious about God.' No array of terms can say how much I am at peace about Goethe's opinions on modern poetry, after examination of such samples as have just been given: and if my voice had weight or authority enough to make itself heard, I would fain take leave to counsel even my elders and my betters, Be not curious to know whether, or in what sense, Goethe meant to say that Byron was the greatest of English poets—whether greater only than Coleridge and Shelley, or greater also than Shakespeare and Milton: for such questions, as St. Paul observes of genealogies, are unprofitable and vain.

The later tribute of Mazzini to Byron claims at our hands a very different degree of consideration. Not merely because, for all who knew and loved him, the name of the man who realized for them the ideal of selfless heroism—of infinite pity, helpfulness, love, zeal,

and ardour as divine in the heat of wrath as in the glow of charity—set before us in the records of the life and character of Jesus is never to be lightly spoken, or cited without a sense of inward and infinite reverence: not merely because they feel and acknowledge that in him it was given them to see for once how divine a thing human nature may be when absolutely and finally divorced from all thought or sense of self; made perfect in heroism and devotion, even to the point, not merely unattainable but unimaginable for most men, of disregarding even the imputations of selfishness and cowardice; 'gentle, and just, and dreadless' as Shelley's ideal demigod, with the single-hearted tenderness and lovingkindness of a little child: not on any such inadequate and uncritical grounds as these, but simply because it seems to me that Mazzini alone has hit the mark which should be aimed at by all who undertake the apology or attempt the panegyric of Byron. 'That man *never* wrote from his heart,' says Thackeray, sweepingly and fiercely: 'he got up rapture and enthusiasm with an eye to the public.' The only answer to this is that on one single point, but that one a point of unsurpassed importance and significance, the imputation is insupportable and unjust. He wrote from his heart when he wrote of politics—using that sometimes ambiguous term in its widest and most accurate significance. A just and contemptuous hatred of Georgian government, combined with a fitful and theatrical admiration of the first Bonaparte, made him too often write and speak like a vilely bad Englishman—'the friend of every country but his own:' but his sympathy with the cause of justice during the blackest years of

dynastic reaction on the continent makes him worthy even yet of a sympathy and respect which no other quality of his character or his work could now by any possibility command from any quarter worth a moment's consideration or regard. On the day when it shall become accepted as a canon of criticism that the political work and the political opinions of a poet are to weigh nothing in the balance which suspends his reputation—on that day the best part of the fame of Byron will fly up and vanish into air. Setting aside mere instances of passionately cynical burlesque, and perhaps one or two exceptional examples of apparently sincere though vehemently demonstrative personal feeling, we find little really living or really praiseworthy work of Byron's which has not in it some direct or indirect touch of political emotion.

But, without wishing to detract from the just honour which has been paid to him on this score, and paid at least in full if not with over-measure, we must not overlook, in common justice, the seamy side of his unique success among readers who did not read him in English. It is something, undoubtedly, to be set down to a man's credit, that his work—if his work be other than poetic—should lose nothing by translation: always assuming that it has anything to lose. But what shall be said of a poet whose work not only does not lose, but gains, by translation into foreign prose? and gains so greatly and indefinitely by that process as to assume a virtue which it has not? On taking up a fairly good version of *Childe Harold's Pilgrimage* in French or Italian prose, a reader whose eyes and ears are not hopelessly sealed against all distinction of good from bad in rhythm or in style will infallibly be struck by the vast improve-

ment which the text has undergone in the course of translation. The blundering, floundering, lumbering and stumbling stanzas, transmuted into prose and transfigured into grammar, reveal the real and latent force of rhetorical energy that is in them : the gasping, ranting, wheezing, broken-winded verse has been transformed into really effective and fluent oratory. A ranter, of course, it is whose accents we hear in alternate moan and bellow from the trampled platform of theatrical misanthropy : but he rants no longer out of tune : and we are able to discern in the thick and troubled stream of his natural eloquence whatever of real value may be swept along in company with much drifting rubbish. It is impossible to express how much *Childe Harold* gains by being done out of wretchedly bad metre into decently good prose : the New Testament did not gain more by being translated out of canine Greek into divine English. Not that even under these improved conditions Byron's is comparable to the work of a first-rate orator or preacher ; but one may perceive how men to whom English poetry was a strange tongue might mistake it for an impressive and effective example of English poetry.

It seems a trivial waste of time to insist repeatedly and in detail upon the rudiments of art : but when a man who can hardly ever attempt a picture on even the smallest scale without displaying his absolute ignorance of the veriest elements of painting is hailed as a master of his craft, those who respect as well as understand the conditions of its existence will not think a little time and trouble misspent in the reduction of such a thesis to its natural and demonstrable absurdity. But in writing on so absurd a subject it would be absurd to employ what

Mr. Arnold calls the grand style. Let us rather take a handful of samples at random which may give some notion of Byron's; probably the finest example in all literature of that grandiose meanness which was often the leading note of the author's character and conduct. There are faults of style perceptible, no doubt, in poets of real greatness: Wordsworth's, for instance, are vexatious to the most loyal and thankful student in no small degree: but they are such faults as are possible to a great poet in moments of great perversity; Byron's, most distinctly, are not. His lava kisses and his baby earthquakes; his walls which have scalps, and pinnacle those scalps (was ever such jolter-headed jargon heard before, from Bedlam or Parnassus?) in cloud less thick than the confusion of such a chaos of false images; his stormy nights that are lovely in their strength as is—of all things on earth—the light of a woman's dark eye, or a dark eye in woman; his day that dies like a dolphin; his 'grocer's shop kept by one Nightingale'—as Landor ingeniously expounded the long insoluble conundrum with which the *Bride of Abydos* confronts all comers on the threshold: these and other such hideous absurdities as these oblige us to reconsider the question, whether the generation of our fathers may not have been right after all in deciding—as we know from so illustrious a spokesman as Thackeray that his young contemporaries, in the freshness of their enthusiasm for Wordsworth, Keats, and the rising star of Tennyson, did most unhesitatingly and vehemently decide—that this idol of our grandfathers or grandmothers could maintain no higher title to fame than one which is the appanage of every successful pressman or improvisatore—the title of a very clever man. One thing

is very certain: no man with a touch of true spiritual instinct could have perpetrated such monstrous stupidities. The perpetrator had fancy, wit, fire natural and artificial, with very remarkable energy and versatility: but in all the composition of his highly composite nature there was neither a note of real music nor a gleam of real imagination. If these certainly rather considerable defects are held sufficient to deprive a man of all claim to the title of poet, then undoubtedly Byron is no more a poet than any one of the tribe of dunces decimated by Pope. But the same may be said of Pope himself; and the present writer at least is not Wordsworthian enough to insist, in the name of critical accuracy, that the title of poet—'with a difference'—may not be granted to the authors of *Don Juan* and the *Rape of the Lock*.

This conjunction of names would be unjust to either poet if we should overlook the points in which either excelled the other. Pope could not have put such fiery fancy, such a force of impulse and emotion, into the *Vision of Judgment* or the successful parts of *Don Juan*, any more than he could have been guilty of such unspeakable abominations, such debauched excesses of bad taste run mad and foaming at the mouth, as the examples lately cited from *Childe Harold*; or than he could, in his critical aspect,—however captious his temper, and however limited his view—have been capable of such grotesque impertinence as theirs (if any such critics there be) who would defend such examples of poetic style by reminding objectors of the undisputed and indisputable facts that a dying dolphin does really exhibit a superb succession of colours, and that to a young lover the light of a dark eye in woman, or a woman's dark eye, is an

object of equal and superior impressiveness and importance to the sight of a thunder-storm at midnight. Who in the name of Momus ever questioned it? Neither is it less unquestionable to any one who knows good work from bad that the fashion in which these facts have been expressed in verse and utilized for illustration by the author of *Childe Harold* is such as would have been simply impossible to a writer born with even an average allowance of imaginative perception or of instinctive taste. And this is the author placed almost at the head of modern poets by the eminent poet and critic who has so long, so loudly, and so justly preached to the world of letters the supreme necessity of 'distinction' as the note of genuine style which alone enables any sort of literary work to survive! Shakespeare and Hugo are not good enough for him: in *Macbeth* and in *Hernani* he finds damning faults of style, and a plentiful lack of distinction: the text of the latter he garbles and falsifies as Voltaire garbled and falsified the text of Shakespeare, and apparently for the same purpose—as unworthy of the one philosopher as of the other. But in Byron—of all remembered poets the most wanting in distinction of any kind, the most dependent for his effects on the most vulgar and violent resources of rant and cant and glare and splash and splutter—in Byron the apostle of culture, and the author of such nobly beautiful and blameless work as *Thyrsis* and the songs of Callicles, finds a seed of immortality more promising than in Coleridge or Shelley, the two coequal kings of English lyric poetry. All Mr. Arnold's readers will remember the effect produced on him by the case of 'that poor girl Wragg;' a remembrance which emboldens me to quote from a later

newspaper report a singular example of critical coincidence or sympathy with his tastes on the part of 'the Sunderland murderer Fury.' Of that inarticulate poet, who 'beat his music out,' if I remember, in a very 'grim and earnest,' not to say Titanic and rather lurid-spectral, though not undivine fashion—if the Calvinistic or Carlylesque idea of the divine nature be in any degree consonant with Fact—the journals of his day have placed on record the following memoranda, here cited from the *Pall Mall Gazette*: 'He has great taste for poetry, can recite long passages from popular poets, Byron's denunciation of the pleasures of the world having for him great attraction, as a description of his own experiences. Wordsworth is his favourite poet. He confesses himself a villain.'

In the year 1865, when the reputation of Byron among lovers of poetry was perhaps not far from its lowest ebb, and the reputation of the illustrious poet who in early youth had been placed by the verdict of his admirers in the seat once occupied by the author of *Don Juan* was perhaps not far from its highest point of well-deserved popularity, a writer who stood up to speak a modest word in praise of Byron was not ungratified by the assurance, though conveyed at second hand, that his championship of a 'discredited' name had given great satisfaction to Byron's oldest surviving friend, the comrade of his early travels and the commentator of his once most admired poem. Since then a far more thorough vindication has been at once more boldly and more ably undertaken by Professor Nichol, in the most brilliant and searching estimate ever given of Byron's character, his work, and his career. A more competent

or a more dexterous counsel for the defence could by no possibility have been retained. The previous and comparatively half-hearted spokesman on the same side, impeached at the time as an anti-Wordsworthian, has found himself, since the appearance of this more cordial and elaborate apology, denounced as an anti-Byronite. What he now would wish to say might easily be expressed in a turn of phrase borrowed from Thackeray. 'Be not a Pigeon,' said the great novelist, at the close of one of his miscellaneous papers: 'but it is better to be a Pigeon than a Rook.' Be not a Wordsworthian, I would advise, in any narrow or exclusive or sectarian sense of the term: but it is better to be a Wordsworthian than a Byronite.

Great as was Milton's influence on Wordsworth, it could no more affect the indomitable independence of his genius than the study of classic poets could affect that of Milton's own. When the impression of Milton's rhythmic majesty is most perceptible in the sublimest and most splendid verse of Wordsworth, it is always nevertheless the note of Wordsworth's own voice, not of Milton's as repeated and enfeebled by a dwindling echo, that we hear. Let us see how far the direct mimicry of a great poet's metrical inspiration could avail to give strength or sweetness to the naturally flaccid and untunable verse of Byron. This is the sort of stuff he has to offer in imitation of Coleridge's metre in *Christabel*—or rather in imitation of Scott's imitation of Coleridge's metre.

> Mount ye, spur ye, skirr the plain,
> That the fugitive may flee in vain, (*sic*)
> When he breaks from the town; and none escape,
> Aged or young, in the Christian shape.

This is a sample of Byron's choicer verse, as selected for our admiring notice by Mr. Arnold, in a volume designed to bear witness of his superiority as a poet to Coleridge and Shelley. The editor in his preface has done me the honour to cite, in a tone of courteous and generous cordiality which I am anxious to acknowledge, the phrase in which I have claimed for Byron at his best 'the excellence of sincerity and strength.' But surely he would not differ from me in thinking that this is not the broken gallop of rough vigour; it is the sickly stumble of drivelling debility. *Harold the Dauntless*—a poem not on the whole to be classed, any more than *The Field of Waterloo*, among the more justifiable claims of Scott to poetic immortality—has nothing in it of such pitiful incompetence. And I agree with Mr. Arnold that the passage in which it occurs is no unfair sample of one of the most animated and spirited among the serious poems of Byron. Let us try again—still following in the wake of the same distinguished critic. Here is another taste from the same platter, as served up on the select and studiously arranged board at which he invites us to sit down and partake of the chosen viands over which he has just said grace.

> Though her eye shone out, yet the lids were fix'd,
> And the glance that it gave was wild and unmix'd
> With aught of change, as the eyes may seem
> Of the restless who walk in a troubled dream;
> Like the figures on arras, that gloomily glare,
> Stirr'd by the breath of the wintry air,
> So seen by the dying lamp's fitful light, (!)
> Lifeless, but life-like, and awful to sight;

As they seem, through the dimness, about to come down
From the shadowy wall where their images frown;
Fearfully flitting to and fro,
As the gusts on the tapestry come and go.

Now this, we feel, is the sort of thing
That is easy for any boy to bring
Up to any extent who has once
Read Coleridge or Scott, and is not quite a dunce,
Though he have but a blue-eyed cat's pretence
To an ear—as needs no sort of evidence.
It could hardly be easier even to spout
Volumes of English hexameters out
(With as much notion of music in rhythms
As men seek in a column of logarithms)
Than thus to perpetuate the simper and snivel
Of those various Medoras, that dreadfully drivel;
And, from all who have any conception what verse is,
To provoke remarks that might sound like curses.[1]

[1] I must observe moreover that it was
As
Extravagant a piece of criticism
To
Compare—as some unwary critics do—
Such verse as Byron's (bristling
With every sort and kind of barbarism
And solecism—
Not to speak of the tune,
Which suggests the love-strains of a baboon)
With any verse by Shelley
As to compare a jaded waggoner's whistling
To á lark's tune, or á star tó a jelly,
Or thé glare óf the footlights tó
A rainbow's prism
In thé cloud just where ít lets thé sun through,
Or
Anything tó what ít is únfit fór,
And not let such vile verse—why should it not?—
Rot. Cf. *Heaven and Earth*, passim.

A very few years ago, it would have been no more necessary to offer such remarks as these than to suggest that Sir William Davenant was not equal to Milton as an epic poet, nor Sir Robert Stapylton superior to Shakespeare as a dramatist. And I really should almost as soon have expected to see Lord Tennyson take up the cudgels for *Gondibert*, or Sir Henry Taylor for the *Slighted Maid*, as to find Mr. Arnold throwing the shield of his authority over the deformed and impotent nakedness of such utterly unutterable rubbish. He has complained elsewhere, with perfect justice, that Byron is 'so empty of matter.' Is it then the charm of execution, the grace of language, the perfection of form, which attracts him in the author of the *Siege of Corinth*? Is it 'the fount of fiery life,' 'the thunder's roll,' perceptible in such productions as these? Byron ὑψιβρεμέτης is a thunderer whose bolt was forged most assuredly on no diviner anvil than that with which Dennis or Cibber is represented in the text or notes of the *Dunciad* as shaking the souls of his audience. Is it his dramatic or lyrical gift? There is certainly some very effective rhetoric in one or two of his shorter pieces: but 'the lyrical cry' which his panegyrist so properly requires—the pure note which can be breathed only from the pure element of lyric verse—is wanting alike in his earliest and his latest effusions, noble and impressive in sentiment and in style as a few—a very few of them—indisputably are. As to his dramatic faculty, it was grossly overpraised by Macaulay in the following sentence:—'It is hardly too much to say, that Lord Byron could exhibit only one man and only one woman.' On the contrary, I would venture to submit, but in a very different sense, it is greatly too much to

say. He could exhibit only two squeaking and disjointed puppets: there is, as far as I can remember, just one passage in the whole range of his writings which shows any power of painting any phase of any kind of character at all: and this is no doubt a really admirable (if not wholly original) instance of the very broadest comedy —the harangue addressed by Donna Julia to her intruding husband. The famous letter addressed to her boy-lover on his departure by that lineal descendant of Wycherley's Olivia in the *Plain Dealer* is an admirably eloquent and exceptionally finished piece of writing, but certainly, with its elaborate poise of rhetoric about the needle and the pole, is not an exceptional instance either of power to paint character and passion from the naked life, or of ability to clothe and crown them with the colour and the light of genuine imagination. A poet with any real insight into the depth of either comic or tragic nature could have desired no finer occasion for the display of his gift, though assuredly he could have chosen none more difficult and dangerous, than such a subject as is presented by history in the figure of Catherine the Great. Terror and humour would have been the twin keynotes of his work; as effective in their grotesque and lurid union as the harmony of terror and pity in the severer art of the ancient stage. Landor, in half a dozen pages or less, has shown what a wealth of possibility was here open to a poet of serious aim as well as satiric insight. What has Byron made of the great, generous, fearless, shameless and pitiless woman of genius whom a far mightier artist was six years later to place before us in her habit as she lived, breathing lust and blood, craving fame and power, consumed and

unsubdued by the higher and the lower ardours of a nature capable of the noblest and ignoblest ambition and desire? The Russian episode in *Don Juan* is a greater discredit to literature by its nerveless and stagnant stupidity than even by the effete vulgarity of its flat and stale uncleanliness. Haidée and Dudù are a lovely pair of lay-figures: but the one has only to be kissed, and to break a blood-vessel: the other—has even less to do. Lady Adeline promises better than any other study from the same hand, and Aurora Raby is a graceful sketch in sentimental mezzotint: what might have been made of them in time we can but guess: it is only certain that nothing very much worth making had been made of them, when the one poem in which Byron showed even a gleam of power to draw characters from life was dropped or cut short at a point of somewhat cynical promise. Further evidence would hardly have been requisite to display the author's incapacity for dramatic no less than for lyric poetry, even had his injudicious activity not impelled him to write plays beside which even Voltaire's look somewhat less wretchedly forlorn. For indeed nothing quite so villainously bad as Byron's tragedies is known to me as the work of any once eminent hand which ever gave proof of any poetic vigour or energy at all. As a dramatist, Voltaire stands nearer to Corneille—nay, Dryden stands nearer to Shakespeare—than Byron to Voltaire or to Dryden. In one only of his dramatic miscreations is there the dimmest glimpse of interest discoverable, even as regards the mere conduct of the story: and this play is the most impudent instance of barefaced theft to be found in the records of our literature. The single original thing in it, and the most

original thing in its companion dramas, is of course the rhythm; and on this it would assuredly have seemed needless to waste a word or a smile, had not the author of some of the stateliest and purest blank verse ever written appeared as the most recent champion of Byron's claim to a place among the great representative poets of a language in which the metre of Marlowe and of Milton affords a crowning test of poetic power.

> The only way to criticise it is
> To write a sentence (which is easy to
> Do, and has been done once or twice before
> Now) in the metre of *Cain*, or of *The*
> *Two Foscari*, or *Heaven and Earth*, or *The*
> *Deformed Transformed*, *Sardanapalus*, or
> *Werner*—nay, *Faliero* (such is the
> Way the name is elongated in his
> Play—which is not agreeable to an
> Ear which has any sense of sound left). It
> Is hardly harder (as the bard might have
> Said) to write pages upon pages in
> This style—base beyond parody—than to
> Write as ill in Scott's usual metre: but
> All will allow that in both cases it
> Is an excruciating process for
> Persons accustomed to read or write verse.[1]

Imitation of Byron's 'mighty line'—parody of it, I repeat, is impossible—would not long since have been a weary, stale, flat and unprofitable jest: but it is a flatter and a staler jest yet to reclaim precedence for his drawling draggle-tailed drab of a Muse over Polymnia when she speaks through Coleridge, Euterpe when she speaks

[1] The metre here is Byron's, 'every line:
For God's sake, reader! take it not for mine.'

through Keats, Urania when she speaks through Shelley. Iynx it was—the screaming wryneck—that inspired the verse of Byron with its grace of movement and its charm of melody. And all the world knows what became of that songstress and her tuneful sisters when they challenged the Muses to a contest less unequal than would be the contest of the long since plume-plucked Byron with the least of the three poets just named.

The instinct of Byron himself on this subject was truer than that of his latest and rashest advocate. From Chaucer to Wordsworth, the greatest names on the record of English poetry were the objects of his lifelong insult. Of Shakespeare he always wrote and spoke as the author of the vilest and most pretentious dramatic abortions ever misbegotten by dullness upon vanity, or by egotism upon envy, might naturally have been expected to speak. Some honest souls in his own day expressed surprise at this graceful feature of their noble poet's intelligence. Had they been such 'very clever fellows' as he was, they would have understood as distinctly as himself that he was not of the same kind as the objects of his insolence; that each of these must first be dethroned if ever he was to be enthroned as a poet of the first or even of the second class. It would have been as wonderful, as inconsistent, as preposterous, if the authors of *Zaïre* and *The Two Foscari* had paid due tribute to Shakespeare, as if the authors of *The Cenci* and *Le Roi s'amuse* had not. Envy is keen of scent, and incompetence may be quick of eye: the impotent malignity of Byron was seldom personally mistaken in the object of its rabid but innocuous attack. Rogers, whom he flattered in public and lampooned in secret, did work

perhaps bad enough at its worst to deserve the dishonour of such praises, and certainly good enough at its best to deserve the honour of such insults, as were showered on his name by his honest and high-minded admirer. Campbell, too, wrote much that prevents us from wondering at Byron's professions of reverence for the author of such lucubrations as *The Pleasures of Hope*; yet it is inexplicable that the author of two out of the three great lyric poems in the language inspired by love of England should not also have been honoured by a stab in the back from the alternate worshipper and reviler of Napoleon: hatred of his country in one mood, and envy of his rival in the other, might have been expected to instigate his easily excitable insolence to some characteristic form of outrage. Possibly the sense of Campbell's popularity may have made him cautious: he did not, except in early youth, venture openly to attack any but unpopular figures in the world of letters. These, however, are not the names to be properly set against Byron's; though very decidedly less improper for such comparison than those three which Mr. Arnold has chosen for sacrifice at the shrine of paradox. Of the three which may with somewhat more show of reason be bracketed with the name of Byron, two must be rated above it as representative of qualities which according to Mr. Arnold's favourite canon would advance them to a higher rank in poetry than I should have been disposed to assign either to Crabbe, to Scott, or to Southey. The tragic power of Crabbe is as much above the reach of Byron as his singularly vivid though curiously limited insight into certain shades of character. All the ramping renegades and clattering corsairs that strut and fret their hour on

the boards of a facile and theatrical invention vanish into their natural nothingness if confronted with the homely horror of an indisputable personality such as that of the suspected parricide, alone in his fisher's boat at noon among the salt marshes: it would take many a high-stepping generation of Laras to match the terrible humility of Peter Grimes.[1] And though, as Mr. Leslie Stephen has observed, the highest note of imagination may be wanting to the noble and forcible verses which reproduce in such distinctness of detail the delirious visions of a mind unhinged by passionate self-indulgence, yet the short-winged and short-winded fancy of Byron never rose near the height of actual and vivid perception attained by the author of *Sir Eustace Grey*. His dry catalogue of unimpressive horrors in the poem called *Darkness* is as far below the level of Crabbe in his tragic mood as the terrors of Crabbe are below the level of Dante's. If Wordsworth, as Shelley said in his haste, 'had as much imagination as a pint-pot,' I know not what fractional subdivision of a gill would not be more than adequate to represent the exact measure of Byron's. All his serious poetry put together is hardly worth—or, to say the very least, it can show nothing to be set

[1] Two lines put into the dying ruffian's mouth have a might of tragic truth for which if a writer of the order of Byron 'would give all the substance of his house, it would utterly be contemned.' Shakespeare could not have bettered, and hardly any one lesser than Shakespeare could have matched, such a stroke of dreadful nature as this (the words being spoken of a dead father by a dying son):

> 'He cried for mercy, which I kindly gave,
> *But he has no compassion in his grave.*'

The deepest or the highest note ever struck by the hand of Byron would sound after that like a penny whistle after the trumpet of doomsday.

beside—'that incomparable passage in Crabbe's *Borough*, which (according to Macaulay) 'has made many a rough and cynical reader cry like a child;' and indeed, though I am not myself so rough and cynical as ever to have experienced that particular effect from its perusal, it does seem to me impossible for any man at all capable of being touched through poetry by the emotions of terror and pity to read the record of that dream in the condemned cell, with its exquisite realistic touches of seaside nature and tender innocent gladness, and not feel himself under the spell of a master tenfold more potent than Byron.

Culture, it should seem, cannot condescend to take any account of such humble claims as those of the simple old provincial clergyman whose homespun habit of obsolete and conventional style is the covering of a rarer pathos and a riper humour than have often been devoted to the service of mere straightforward accuracy in study from the life which lay nearest to the student. But a writer whom even the culture which finds poetic satisfaction nowhere outside the range of Byron or of Wordsworth cannot pretend wholly to ignore, though it may dismiss as with a passing shrug his claims to be considered as a competitor with these,—a writer for whom even Byron would seem to have been capable at times of something like manly respect and honest admiration, —never failed to pay tribute alike to the tragic force and to the humorous simplicity of a poet reared under auspices the most opposite to those which had so happily fostered his own genius. Sir Walter Scott was neither a profound nor a pretentious critic—neither a refined nor an eccentric theorist: but his judgments

have always the now more than ever invaluable qualities of clearness and consistency. To me, as to Mr. Arnold, his praise of Byron seems singularly ill-judged and ridiculously ill-worded: yet it is at least more intelligible than that which would couple him with Wordsworth as a moral force or help towards a lucid and stimulating criticism of life. But in speaking of Crabbe the great northern master was speaking of one more within his own high range of practical sympathy—more allied in temper and in gifts to his own wider and more beneficent genius. And even while that genius was still in the main misdirected into verse, it showed almost as clearly as was later to be shown in prose its vast superiority to Byron's in grasp of human character and in command of noble sympathies. His English was often as slovenly as even Byron's; though never so vile in taste as the worst examples of this latter. On the other hand, the language of Byron's metrical tales has undeniably far more point and force, far more terseness and pliancy combined, than the diffuse and awkward style of Scott's, full of lazy padding and clumsy makeshifts. But set almost any figure drawn by Scott beside almost any figure of Byron's drawing, and the very dullest eye will hardly fail to see the difference between a barber's dummy and a living man fresh from the hand of Velasquez or of God. Lambro is admirably described and introduced: Bertram Risingham is described in phrase rather conventional than choice, and introduced with no circumstance of any special originality or distinction: but when Lambro appears in person on the stage of action, he is as utter a nullity as any of his brother or sister puppets: Bertram, however roughly sketched, is a figure alive to

the very finger-tips. The difference, of course, has been often enough pointed out before now, and with memorable effect, especially, by a critic on whom Mr. Arnold is never weary of emptying the vials of his Attic scorn: but on this matter I must confess that I would rather be right with Lord Macaulay than wrong with Mr. Arnold. Of men, to judge from his writings, Byron knew nothing: of women he knew that it was not difficult to wheedle those who were not unwilling to be wheedled. He also knew that excess of any kind entails a more or less violent and a more or less permanent reaction: and here his philosophy of life subsided into tittering or snivelling silence. On all these points Scott is as far ahead of him as Shakespeare is ahead of Scott. A commonplace sermon does not cease to be commonplace because its doctrine is unorthodox, and cynical twaddle is none the less twaddle because of its cynicism. Scott is doubtless, as his French critics used to deplore, deficient in depth and intensity of passion; yet his passion too has more life and reality than Byron's. It is not enough for a writer to protest that his characters are bursting and burning with passion: they must do something to second him—to make us feel and see that they are. And this is exactly what no Gulnare or Gulbeyaz of them all can do. The puppet begins to squeak, and we perceive at once the incompetence of the showman; in place of a dramatist we have a scene-painter. It follows that with all his blustering profession of experience and preparation for display Byron, when it comes to the point, proves to be really not a poet of passion at all. There is plenty of rant in his work, there is plenty of wantonness, and there is plenty of wit: but Lord Tennyson has put

more passion into the six little stanzas of a poem published at the age of twenty-four than could be distilled by compression out of all that Lord Byron ever wrote. In those six short stanzas, without effort, without pretence, without parade—in other words, without any of the component qualities of Byron's serious poetry,—there is simple and sufficient expression for the combined and contending passions of womanly pride and rage, physical attraction and spiritual abhorrence, all the outer and inner bitterness and sweetness of hatred and desire, resolution and fruition and revenge. And as surely and as greatly as the author of this poem had almost at his starting distanced and defeated Byron as a painter of feminine passion, had Scott defeated and distanced him long before as a painter of masculine action. And for this among other reasons, Scott, with all his many shortcomings in execution, with all his gaps and flaws and deficiencies and defects, must surely always retain the privilege assigned by Thackeray to Goldsmith—high as are doubtless Goldsmith's claims to that privilege—of being 'the most beloved of English writers.' Two names far higher than his will be more beloved as well as more honoured by those who find their deepest delight in the greatest achievements of dramatic and lyric poetry: but the lovers of this last will always be fewer, if more ardent, than the lovers of other and humbler, less absolute and essential forms of art; and though dramatic poetry, even at its highest pitch of imagination, appeals to a far wider and more complex audience, yet even Shakespeare, though less than Shelley, demands of the student who would know and love him something more than is common to all simple and healthy natures. But Sir Walter

demands nothing of his reader beyond a fair average allowance of kindliness and manhood : the man must be a very Carlyle who does not love and honour him. His popularity may fluctuate now and then with elder readers —so much the worse for them : it is sure always to right itself again in a little time : but when it wanes among English boys and girls a doomsday will be dawning of which as yet there are most assuredly no signs or presages perceptible. Love of Scott, if a child has not the ill fortune to miss by some mischance the benefit of his generous influence, is certain to outlast all changes of interest and inclination, from the age when he divides a heart of six or seven with the owner's first pony to the age when affectionate gratitude has rooted in the adult heart a hundred names and associations of his engrafting, only less deep and dear than those implanted there by Shakespeare's very self. Almost any fault may well seem pardonable in such a benefactor as this : his genius has the privilege of beauty such as Cleopatra's : for vilest things become themselves in him ; so that the sternest republicans may bless him when he is most a royalist—yes, even a Georgian royalist—and men of the most scrupulous honour in questions of literary as well as other society may forgivingly overlook even his public association with libellers of private life and character, with conductors of such tainted publications as the *Beacon* and the *Blackguard's Magazine*—such 'dogs and swine' as excite, in Mr. Browning's poem, the loathing and indignation of the very Ghetto : though then as now the writer and circulator of privately printed attacks on the personal reputation of any honourable man must have been considered by all men of honour as a person

of character too degraded to be damaged even by the unanswerable charges of cowardice and lying—a rascal whose back would dishonour the hangman's lash, as his society would disgrace the keeper of a brothel; and though then as now the highest eminence in letters could neither have protected nor redeemed from the stain of an indelible ignominy, the plague-spot of an incurable disgrace, a name polluted by conscious and voluntary association with the name of so infamous a wretch. To such intercourse as this we need not imagine that Scott could ever have descended: but the weapons of license and scurrility plied by some at least of his associates were so poisonously foul and cowardly that the one thing wanting to the perfection of their dishonour was the precaution of an abject and furtive semi-privacy. Something of indignation as well as regret we cannot choose but feel at the recollection that the hand which has bequeathed us such countless and priceless treasures should ever have pressed hands which had penned such villainies as defile the columns of the ruffianly political publications of his day: yet the most intolerant of moralists cannot feel towards him as all honest and loyal men must feel towards the writer of such a note as Byron addressed, in attempted self-exculpation, to the Consul-General at Venice in the spring of 1821—towards the coward who deliberately suppressed the evidence which would have proved him a traitor to friendship more dastardly and disloyal than ever selfishness has made of a man perhaps not originally or at all points ungenerous or malignant.

If, then, precedence among poets is to depend upon their more or less valuable criticism of life, it would

seem that Scott's right of precedence over Byron is as unassailable as any critical position can possibly be made. But upon this assumption I do not care to insist; being, if I must repeat the confession, unable to accept a theory which when reduced to any intelligible scheme of interpretation and application would place Theognis above Sappho and Lucan above Catullus. Nay, it would be somewhat difficult to prove that this theory would not place above Byron a writer whom on the whole I certainly should not incline to place higher than beside him. It is perhaps to the friendship and veneration of two among the most illustrious men of two succeeding generations that the name of Southey seems now to owe the best and most precious part of its celebrity. The author of *Count Julian* and the author of *Philip van Artevelde* have embalmed the memory of their friend with the myrrh and frankincense of such noble and imperishable praise, in prose and in verse, that all who revere them are bound to honour the man held so worthy of their reverence. That this enthusiastic veneration was awakened less by his capacity as a poet than by the attractive nobility of certain qualities in his personal character can hardly be doubted by any one who considers the unquestionable fact that no two poets were ever freer than they—that perhaps not one other living in his time was quite so absolutely free—from the incurable weakness which impairs all the merits of Southey's verse: its facile, thin, perpetual prolixity of narrative, of rhetoric, and of reflection; its utter want of select or precise or distinctive expression for ideas which moreover might in most cases have been as well expressed in prose as quiet and as pure

The changeless amble of his blank verse, never breaking even into a trot, might almost make us regret even that dissonant jolt which Byron substituted for the long easy canter of the Spenserian stanza under the guidance of its original master's serene and skilful hand. That he writes incomparably better English than Byron's is perhaps, if the admirers of a Titanic or Cyclopean style will allow of the modest suggestion, a point not wholly unworthy of notice or regard in estimating the comparative rank and station of an English writer. The gift of poetic or creative imagination had been withheld by nature from either competitor with a perfectly absolute impartiality. There is just as much of it in *Childe Harold* as in *Thalaba*, and there is just as little of it in *Roderick* as in *The Corsair*.

Mr. Arnold, with a brilliant and ingenious humour which it would almost be impertinence to praise, has assigned the distinctive qualities of different writers to the character and influence of the social rank or class in which they respectively were born. I have before now ventured to enter my protest against the paradoxical union of Byron's name with Shelley's as a representative of the nobler qualities traditionally attributed to an aristocracy. Chivalry in the deepest and highest sense was the key-note of Shelley's whole character: Byron, generous and brave as he could show himself on special occasion, simply did not know what chivalrous feeling meant: his sense of honour was rather less fine than Sir John Falstaff's. I am not referring to his treatment, whatever it may have been, of the various Caroline Lambs and Jane Clermonts who uttered in public or in private such high-pitched notes of ululation and impre-

cation over his alleged atrocities: I am decidedly inclined to doubt whether anything much worse befell them at his hands than they richly and amply deserved. Even if the brutalities and villainies imputed by these distressed damsels or matrons to the lover whose favours had been withdrawn from them could be verified in every point, they would not weigh so heavily against his pretentions to be taken for a type of the class in which honour or loyalty is the supreme principle or final expression of duty, as would his derelictions from this rule of honour, his acts of treason to that common instinct of ordinary loyalty, in his relations with friends whose claim on his good faith was simple and indisputable by the laws of any social code whatever. Byron, in such matters, was sometimes as much beneath the conventional average level of gentle or noble manhood as Shelley was always above it: and the case could hardly be put more strongly or more truthfully. A typical aristocrat, however lawless and reckless in his mode of life or habit of expression, will not exactly play at chuck-farthing with his word of honour, or throw the dirt of his impertinence at ladies who happen to have married his rivals in literary celebrity. He may do many things no less morally wrong than these: but these are things that he most emphatically and assuredly will not do. An infinitely less important though certainly a significant and amusing sign of the same inborn vulgarity was the uneasy mixture of brag and fidget—the two most essentially plebeian moods of mind that can be imagined—which would seem to have always distinguished his displays of pride on the subject

of ancestral honours. A man who can show quarterings with princes—whatever may be the value of that accidental distinction—does not usually talk and write, as Byron so constantly did, in the very tone which might be expected from a capitalist of unknown grandparents who had just purchased a brand-new pedigree of literally fabulous antiquity. No: to each and all of Mr. Arnold's recent claims on behalf of his unfortunate client, truth, with all the evidence in hand, is constrained to reply in the memorable phrase of Lord Jeffrey—'This will never do.' If we want a type of patrician character, good or bad or worse or better, we must not look to Byron. But—still following up the suggestion of Mr. Arnold—we might, I think, find in Southey an almost perfect type of a class which has often fared somewhat hardly at his critical hands. Good and true and honest in every relation of life, exemplary for justice and admirable for kindness in his dealings with every one who did not offend his prejudice or disturb his self-complacency, it might most truly have been said of Southey 'that after the most straitest sect of their religion he lived a Pharisee.' The last letter, for example, that he ever addressed to Shelley, breathes, in every word of every phrase, the veriest insolence of self-righteousness. One of the truest and loyallest of grateful friends and helpful benefactors, he was as thorough a sample of the English middle-class in the solid all-sufficient narrowness of his rigid self-esteem as was Carlyle of all that is best and all that is worst in the typical character of the good or the bad peasant of fiction or of fact—brave, honest, affectionate, laborious, envious, ungrateful, malignant, and selfish. But appa-

rently not always quite selfish: and demonstrably not always quite honest.

In such a man as Shelley it would of course be absurd to see a typical representative of any class. Born in a manger or a palace, reared in a carpenter's shop or a prince's castle, such an one must always be an equally exceptional figure on the roll of famous men. It is difficult at first to see why it should be so difficult as apparently it is for most judges to consider a figure of this kind with any degree of equanimity. But it is evident that if on the one hand certain recent writers have been whirled by the enthusiasm of righteous reverence into the extravagance of apostolic adoration which bids them preach him to all men as a sort of poetic Messiah, wounded in the house of his friends, despised and rejected of men in his own generation—in all things like as the greatest other poets are, but without sin (to speak of) in person or in verse—on the other hand there are not yet wanting judges who deny even such claims on his behalf as would afford him any place at all in the front rank of poets and of men. Those who, like the present writer, desire above all things to preserve in all things the golden mean of scrupulous moderation, will content themselves with taking account of a few indisputable facts rather than of many disputable opinions.

Mr. Arnold has spoken with exemplary contempt of Lord Jeffrey's style and principles of criticism: but whenever he speaks of Shelley he borrows from the old Edinburgh fencing-school the rusty foil of that once eminent reviewer, to show off against his object of attack the very same tricks of fence which Jeffrey made use of,

with a skill and strength of hand at least equal to his pupil's, against the struggling reputation of Wordsworth. This can do no manner of harm to Shelley, but it must of necessity affect our estimate of the value of his assailant's opinion on the subject of other men's poetry. Wordsworth, to Lord Jeffrey, was merely the poet of idiot boys, preaching pedlars, bibulous waggoners, and the mendicant class in general: his poetry was typified in Alice Fell's torn cloak—'a wretched, wretched rag indeed.' But Lord Jeffrey did not add that 'those who extol him as the poet of rags, the poet of clothes-tubs, are only saying that he did not, in fact, lay hold upon the poet's right subject-matter.' He would have known that outside 'the all-miscreative brain' of a critical jester these erroneous persons had and could have no existence: that those who extolled Wordsworth, though the scope of their admiration might or might not include the poems which dealt with such matters, extolled him as the poet of things very different from these. And Jeffrey's imitator in the more cunning devices of one-sided or one-eyed criticism cannot surely affect to imagine that 'those who extol him as the poet of clouds, the poet of sunsets,' —if any there be whose estimate of his poetry is based exclusively or mainly on their value for such attributes of his genius—are in any truer or fitter sense to be accepted as representatives of Shelley's real admirers, than are those sickly drivellers over the name of another great poet, the fulsome worshippers of weakness whose nauseous adoration Mr. Arnold has so justly rebuked, to be fairly accepted as representatives of those who share his admiration for the genius of Keats. These, I must be allowed to say, are the sort of critical tricks which

recoil upon the critic who makes use of them for a showy and hazardous instant. Those to whom, as to the humble writer at present engaged in rash controversy with 'the most distinguished Englishman of his time,' the name of Shelley seems to be indisputably the third—if not the second—on the list of our greatest poets, no more extol him as exclusively or principally the poet of clouds and sunsets than Mr. Arnold extols Wordsworth as the poet of rags and tatters or Keats as the poet of underbred and weakly sensuousness. Not that we do not prefer the nebulosity of Shelley at his cloudiest to the raggedness of Wordsworth at his raggedest or the sickliness of Keats at his sickliest: but this is a point quite beside the main question. Averting our faces from the clouds and sunsets whose admirers give so much offence to Mr. Arnold, what we see in his own judgment on Shelley and Byron might be symbolically described as a sunset of critical judgment in a cloud of hazy paradox. It is a singular certainty that on the subject of Shelley this noble poet and brilliant critic has never got beyond what may be called the 'Johnny Keats' stage of criticism. The Shelley of his imagination has exactly as much in common with the author of the *Ode to Liberty* as the Keats of Gifford's or Wilson's had in common with the author of the *Ode to a Nightingale.* The main features of the phantom's character are apparently these: enthusiastic puerility of mind, incurable unsoundness of judgment, resistless excitability of emotion and helpless inability of intelligence, consumptive wakefulness of fancy and feverish impotence of reason, a dreamily amiable uselessness and a sweetly fantastic imbecility: in a word, the qualities of

a silly angel. I venture, in the face of a very general opinion, to doubt whether such a poet as this ever existed: but I do not doubt at all that none was ever further from any resemblance to such a type than Percy Bysshe Shelley. He wrote very silly stories at school, and villainously bad verses at college: but it is not on this undeniable rather than exceptional fact that the theory of his inspired idiocy—for that is really what it comes to—has ever, to my knowledge, been grounded. Only the hysterical school of critics would deny or dream of denying that until the beneficent influence of Coleridge and Wordsworth had wrought its full effect upon the two greatest among the younger men of their time, Shelley, in the first stage of his apprenticeship to verse, might have been accurately described or defined as Hayley in the spangles of a harlequin, and Keats as Rosa Matilda in a shopboy's jacket. This is even more certain, if possible, than that Keats afterwards showed himself equal —if not, at his very best, superior—to Wordsworth, in poetry pure and simple; or that Shelley, if neither he nor any man that ever lived could outsoar the highest flights of Coleridge's transcendent song, did far more work of the highest kind in eight or nine years than Coleridge in upwards of forty; and that in point of manly conscience and moral emotion, elevation of nature and fortitude of mind, the gulf is not wider between Dryden and Milton, between Horace and Sophocles, than between Coleridge and Shelley. This, however, may be considered insufficient proof that he was other, after all, than a dreamer of dreams, a dweller among the intangible and visionary creations of a gentle, fitful, disorderly, moonstruck sort of mind. But it is evident that in

Shelley the reasoning faculty was comparatively ripe before the imaginative or creative power had outgrown its greenest and sourest stage of crudity. I certainly do not propose to set up his early philosophical or political essays as models of original or profound reflection, of untimely maturity in reasoning or subtle conclusiveness of combination in the recast and rearrangement of other men's positions; nor probably did the boys themselves who compiled that luckless little pamphlet mistake their 'Necessity of Atheism' for a final and exhaustive piece of ratiocination: but as a neat and compact summary of a very simple argument it is surely far from discreditable to their intelligence: and as an answer to many far cruder and shallower forms of appeal or objection on behalf of more popular assumptions, it is in its way and in its degree neither ineffective nor insufficient. More juvenile echoes of more facile conclusions on the other side of the question might have earned for the young champions of orthodoxy the admiring patronage of applause for precocious rectitude of spiritual intuition and premature command of speculative thought. Shelley's subsequent Essay on Deism is surely a work of remarkable precocity and promise for a man too young to have taken his degree; remarkable alike for its grave and sedate command of irony sustained through the whole course of the oblique and double-edged argument, and for its steady grasp and manipulation of the subject from the serious and covert point of view which it was the young controversialist's design at once to indicate and to veil. In politics, Shelley looked steadfastly forward to the peaceful and irreversible advance of republican principle, the gradual and general preva-

lence of democratic spirit throughout Europe, till the then omnipotent and omnipresent forces of universal reaction should be gently but thoroughly superseded and absorbed. Wordsworth could apparently see nothing between existing Georgian or Bourbonian society and a recrudescence of revolutionary chaos but the maintenance of such divine institutions as rotten boroughs and capital punishment. I do not ask which poet held the nobler and the more inspiriting views of the immediate future: I ask which of the two showed himself the befogged, befooled, self-deluded, unpractical dreamer among the clouds and sunsets of his chosen solitude and his chosen faith, and which approved himself the man of insight and foresight, the more practical and the more rational student of contemporary history, alike in its actual pageant of passing phenomena and in its moral substance of enduring principles and lessons? I know nothing more amusing and amazing than the placid imperturbable persistency with which the conservative or reactionary class is prone to claim and assume—of all things in the world—the credit of being at any rate the practical party, as opposed to the dreamy and visionary herd of hot-brained young poets and crack-brained old enthusiasts. For example, it was, if I rightly remember, in the fifth or sixth year of the empire of cutpurses and cutthroats, that a young freshman of eighteen or nineteen was courteously invited to give his opinion on the French and Italian questions of that year in a gathering of distinguished as well as grave and reverend seniors, and on his modest avowal that he did venture to believe in the principles and teaching of men who ventured to believe in the realization of Italian unity, and to disbe-

lieve in the durable solidity of the fortune which had seated Jonathan Wild the Less on the imperial throne of France, found without the slightest touch of surprise that such an ingenuous confession of wrong-headed boyish perversity was received with a general kindly smile of amusement, and a kindly particular exhortation to retain as long as he could find it possible to retain these enthusiastic illusions so natural to his age. And in effect, even in face of the crushing refutation which has since been supplied by the practical and unanswerable evidence of historic facts, he has not seen reason to forego them even at the present day. Mr. Arnold has chosen as a subject for special praise—indeed, as the crowning and redeeming point of interest in an otherwise commonplace if not unworthy character—Byron's aspirations after a republic, his expressed conviction that 'the king-times are fast finishing,' his full and whole-hearted acceptance of the assured prospect that 'there will be blood shed like water and tears like mist, but the peoples will conquer in the end.' Mr. Arnold can scarcely, I should imagine, be readier than I to give all due credit and all possible sympathy to the writer of these wise and noble words: but he seems to overlook the fact that if this feature in Byron's character is deserving of such credit and such sympathy, in Shelley's, whose whole nature was pervaded and harmonized by the inspiration of this faith, it is tenfold more worthy of reverence and regard. Mr. Arnold is fond of scriptural and especially of Pauline illustrations: it is probably the influence of his example which brings to my mind the difference between the chief captain of Jerusalem and the apostle his prisoner. With a great sum had

Claudius Lysias obtained the freedom of a Roman citizen: but Paul was free born. Byron had attained to his faith in the future of republican Europe and the fall of existing institutions at a heavy cost of personal disappointment, dissatisfaction, and irritation with his own circumstances and experiences: but Shelley 'was born so high:' it was in the inevitable and unalterable essence of his nature 'to dally with the wind, and scorn the sun.' For all that on Mr. Arnold's own showing deserves praise in Byron, Shelley deserves praise incomparably more exalted and unqualified. But Mr. Arnold, in a passage which if the argument would allow me to pass it over I should really be reluctant to transcribe, affirms that 'Byron threw himself upon poetry as his organ; and in poetry his topics were not Queen Mab, and the Witch of Atlas, and the Sensitive Plant, they were the upholders of the old order, George the Third, and Lord Castlereagh, and the Duke of Wellington, and Southey, and they were the canters and tramplers of the great world, and they were his enemies and himself.' If I wanted an instance of provincial and barbarian criticism, of criticism inspired by a spirit of sour unreasonableness, a spirit of bitterness and darkness, I should certainly never dream of seeking further than this sentence for the illustration required. It is almost too contemptibly easy to retort in kind by observing that when Shelley threw himself upon poetry as his organ, his topics were not Hours of Idleness, and Hints from Horace, and the Waltz, they were the redemption of the world by the martyrdom of righteousness, and the regeneration of mankind through 'Gentleness, Virtue, Wisdom, and Endurance;' and they were

the heroism of Beatrice and the ascension of Adonais, and they were the resurrection of Italy and of Greece, and they were the divinest things of nature, made more divine through the interpretation of love infallible and the mastery of insuperable song. But so to retort, though the reply would be as perfectly legitimate as the parody is exactly accurate, were to answer a perverse man of genius according to his perversity ; and I will rather content myself with a serious indication of this astonishing criticism as matter for serious regret—not, assuredly, on Shelley's account ; nor even, perhaps, on Byron's.

But if Mr. Arnold is somewhat erratic and eccentric in the display of his preference for Byron as a poet, how may we decorously characterize the insular or individual eccentricity of his preference for Shelley as an essayist and correspondent ? 'Except for a few short things and single stanzas, his original poetry is less satisfactory than his translations, for in these the subject-matter was found for him'—as for instance in the Cyclops of Euripides and the Homeric poem on an infant cattle-stealer ; topics, it is obvious, far above the reach of the man who could rise no higher on his own account than the author of *The Cenci*. 'Nay, I doubt whether his delightful Essays and Letters, which deserve to be far more read than they are now, will not resist the wear and tear of time better, and finally come to stand higher, than his poetry.' I will follow Mr. Arnold's lead, in the selection of a French phrase to pass sentence on this judgment : it is not merely 'saugrenu,' it is simply 'inqualifiable.' Shelley—or Shakespeare, for that matter—is hardly more superior to Byron in poetry than in prose is Byron to Shelley. Shelley's letters are in

general very 'nice,' as women say—very ingenuous, and rather ladylike; the letters of a candid and amiable young person who tries steadily to see for himself, without any great faculty of insight or capacity for getting away from his own subjective line of vision. Byron's are full of violence, insolence, bluster, affectation, hypocrisy, pretention, bullying egotism and swaggering nonsense: but no less certainly and unmistakably are they the letters of a man with a great gift for writing, a man of commanding genius, of indisputable and insuppressible powers. There are no doubt passages in them which are merely foolish or feeble or vulgar, as in Shelley's there are passages and touches of exquisite truth and felicity, of admirable feeling and good sense and delicacy; but the general characteristics of either correspondence are such as have just been indicated. Byron's letters would be worth reading, had they been written by the obscurest of dilettante dabblers in politics or literature: if at every turn there is something to provoke irritation or repulsion, at every other turn there is at the same time something to excite admiration or amusement. Nobody, I should have thought, or at least only a very few specialists who have almost a craze for the literature of 'Elegant Epistles,' would dream of reading Shelley's if they had not been written by the hand which wrote his poems.

The fact is—and it is a fact which for some time past has been growing only too perceptible to some of Mr. Arnold's most cordial and earliest admirers—that to him, in spite of all Wordsworth's guidance, years have brought the unphilosophic mind. Like Philip van Artevelde, he was 'very philosophic in his youth'—I will

not add, with Sir Henry Taylor's self-contemplative hero —'and twilight of philosophy.' It is now just thirty years since he began to rebuke his generation for its irregularity and waywardness and undisciplined bewilderment of taste. Eccentricity, whimsicality, caprice —the mood of mind in which a man would rather say a new thing that is not true than a true thing that is not new—such were the subjects of his fervent and strenuous remonstrance: and such are now, in more instances than one, the dominant notes or the distinctive qualities of his literary criticism. At all events, at all hazards, at any price, he is bent upon startling the reader with some vehement and wayward affirmation of his insurgent and rebellious originality. Because his countrymen accept Shakespeare, Milton, and Shelley as poets of the first order, he is impelled to insist that an Athenian—that a countryman of Æschylus—would have been simply disgusted or diverted by *Hamlet*, *Othello*, or *King Lear*; to present for the respectful consideration of Englishmen the shallow, narrow, captious, pointless and irrelevant animadversions of M. Scherer upon *Paradise Lost*—remarks in which if there are haply some grains of truth and reason, they are as stale and rancid as the critic's general conclusion is untenable and worthless; and to write himself down an eccentric too rampant and extravagant in his dogmatism for the atmosphere of Crotchet Castle, by advancing an opinion that the first of English lyric poets deserves remembrance chiefly as a writer of occasional prose. Let me have leave, as a loyal and a lifelong admirer of Mr. Arnold, to remark that no critical reputation can possibly sur-

vive much more of this sort of thing; that it is annually becoming more and more difficult for the most devoted and sincere goodwill to regard him as a serious judge or authority on questions of literature, or to answer those who think it impossible for him to be considered by steady-going and rational students as other than the most brilliant and the most hare-brained of all eccentric dealers in self-willed and intemperate paradox; and that surely no scholar, and still more surely no poet, can regard with equanimity such a risk of being confounded with the Carlyles and Emersons of his day as must inevitably be incurred by a writer whose estimate of Shelley is such as hitherto has found utterance only from Craigenputtock or from Bedlam, from Concord or from Earlswood. For not only does he lack the excuse which may be pleaded alike for the transatlantic and the cisatlantic pseudosopher, that each had failed as a poetaster before he began to yelp at the heels of poets: he is, with the single exception of Mr. Aubrey de Vere, the only man who has ever written a poem so exactly after the manner of Shelley that both in style and in spirit it is not unworthy of the honour to be mistaken for a genuine lyric of the second order among the minor poems of our greatest lyric poet. Should this be thought too high praise, it will not be denied that the echo of Shelley's voice in its fainter but not least exquisite modulations has been caught with incomparable skill and precision in an early lyric—'Joy comes and goes'—which has very justly been honoured by insertion among the self-selected Poems of Matthew Arnold.

If Shelley's assault on Wordsworth's political character is to be taken as any partial explanation of the

fact that professed Wordsworthians are even more prone to depreciate Shelley than monotheistic worshippers of Shelley are prone to overlook the greatness of his spiritual debt to the influence of Wordsworth, I cannot but think the explanation somewhat less than creditable to their good sense or 'sweet reasonableness.' On the other hand, there is truth in Mr. Arnold's remark that 'almost every one who has praised Wordsworth's poetry has praised it well:' and of this truth we have three eminent examples yet among us besides that of the speaker himself.[1] It would be difficult to pronounce, if not impertinent to aim at pronouncing, whether the praise of Wordsworth has been most weightily and most worthily uttered by Sir Henry Taylor, by the Dean of St. Paul's, or by Mr. Leslie Stephen. Each of these three most distinguished writers has successively taken up his parable in praise of that venerated master and in exposition of his doctrine. Of Wordsworth on his ethical side, of the soundness, the sanity, the profundity of his direct or indirect teaching, the influence and the sources of its comforting, fortifying, and ennobling powers, it would be impossible to speak better and dangerous to speak otherwise than each of these has done after his own fashion. I would not indeed take upon myself to affirm that those who have praised it well have always praised it wisely. Devotion to Wordsworth, if it has a tendency to exalt, has also a tendency to infatuate the judicial sense and spirit of his disciples; to make them, even as compared with other devotees, unusually prone to indulgence in such large assertions and assumptions

[1] We had, in 1884, when this essay was first published.

on their master's behalf as seem at least to imply claims which it may be presumed that their apparent advocates would not seriously advance or deliberately maintain. It would in some instances be as unreasonable to suppose that they would do so as to imagine that Mr. Arnold really considers the dissonant doggrel of Wordsworth's halting lines to a skylark equal or superior to Shelley's incomparable transfusion from notes into words of the spirit of a skylark's song. Such an instance is afforded us by the most illustrious—with a single exception—of all Wordsworth's panegyrists. After an exposition of his philosophy second only in value, if indeed it be second, to the tribute offered by Coleridge, Sir Henry Taylor prefixes to some excellent remarks on the poem of *Michael* the following explanation of his preference for such work to the work of other poets. 'It is an attribute of unusual susceptibility of imagination to need no extraordinary provocatives; and when this is combined with intensity of observation and peculiar force of language, it is the high privilege of the poet so endowed to rest upon the common realities of life and to dispense with its anomalies,—leaving to less gifted writers' such as Æschylus and Sophocles and Shakespeare 'the representation of strange fatalities and of "nature erring from itself."' No better example than this could possibly be chosen of the kind of writing which has done so much to estrange so many from study or appreciation of a poet whose most distinguished admirers apparently find it necessary to vindicate their admiration by the attempted establishment of a principle which if it has any practical significance or import whatsoever would result, when logically and duly carried out, in the

acceptance of such critical canons as would reject Othello and Œdipus and the Oresteia, on the ground of inferiority in subject, from the high station in which they are to be supplanted by such claimants as Peter Bell, and Harry Gill, and the Idiot Boy. If Wordsworth's claims as a poet can only be justified on grounds which would prove him a deeper student of nature, a saner critic of life, a wiser man and a greater poet than Shakespeare, the inference is no less obvious than inevitable: Wordsworth's claims as a poet must in that case go by the board altogether, and at once, and for ever. It is not in any way incompatible with the truest and the deepest admiration for the loftiest of all pastoral poems to enter a respectful protest against this unluckiest of all critical conclusions: and to repeat that protest with some energy when we come upon such a parallel as almost immediately follows it. The critic observes with most unquestionable justice that 'the language of the poet, as the symbol of his power, contributes mainly to the effect.' He adds, with no less unimpeachable accuracy, that 'there are many readers who would in vain search the language of Mr. Wordsworth for tokens of this power—many to whom, in such narratives as *Michael*, his language would be a dead letter as well as his theme. There are many also to whom the language of David in his lamentation over the death of Absalom would be a dead letter, were it not in the Bible that they read it. To such readers violence is power; abrupt and startling ejaculations,' such as those of which the language of David in his aforesaid lamentation is wholly and solely composed, 'or extravagant figures of speech,' such as pervade the poetry of the Bible from end to

end, exposing it no less than the poetry of Shakespeare to the consistent ridicule of Voltaire, 'constitute the language of passion.' Now, if we are to understand that 'the language of passion' is what the poetry of Wordsworth aims at rendering into accurate and rhythmic speech, we can only say that no man ever fell more deplorably short of his aim. And if this is not what we are to understand, to what purpose is this reference? We are compelled either to regard it as absolutely idle and irrelevant, or to assume that the author of *Michael* is accepted by the author of *Artevelde* as a master of the language of passion: and in that case those who would range themselves on his side must evidently resign all previous notions, reject all previous examples, of that language. The psalms of David, the hymns or the imprecations of the prophets, the lamentations or the raptures of the Book of Job, are examples of poetic passion less consonant and less reconcilable in language and in style with the Wordsworthian canon than even the poetry of Æschylus, of Shakespeare, or of Hugo. 'The enthusiasm which lies in the language of reserve,' and which we are bidden to recognize in Wordsworth as a test of poetic superiority, is certainly no distinguishing note of theirs. In the wail of David, in the wail of Cassandra, in the cry of Lear over Cordelia, of Othello over Desdemona, of Triboulet over Blanche and of Fabrice over Isora—in each of these unsurpassable masterpieces of passionate poetry there sounds the same keynote of unbridled and self-abandoned agony, the same breathless and burning strain of music wrung forth without reticence or reserve from the uttermost depths of human suffering: though the diversity of style between

them is perhaps as wide as may be possible between various forms of equally perfect and equally sublime expression discovered by poets of various ages and countries for equally profound and equally permanent varieties of human emotion. Surely it was not the aim of the great poet so eloquently mispraised, if not sometimes so perversely misinterpreted, by the exponents of his demands on our admiration—surely it was not the aim of Wordsworth to work on the same lines, to rule in the same province as do these. Meditation and sympathy, not action and passion, were the two main strings of his serene and stormless lyre. On these no hand ever held more gentle yet more sovereign rule than Wordsworth's. His command of all qualities and powers that are proper to the natural scope and adequate to the just application of his genius was as perfect as the command of those greater than he—of the greatest among all great poets—over the worlds of passion and of action. And therefore, if his unwary and uncritical disciples would abstain from forcing the question upon their readers by dint of misapplied or unqualified eulogy, few or none would care to recall the fact that when Wordsworth, at the age of twenty-six—the age at which Keats died and Shelley had not four years more to live, made his one attempt to invade that province of poetry which above all others requires from its invaders a mastery of such resources as Shelley could command at the age of twenty-seven—an imaginative grasp and a sympathetic understanding of action and of passion, the result was a tragedy to which perhaps somewhat less than justice has been done on the score of literary

power, but which, in the moral conception and development of its leading idea, is, I suppose, unparalleled by any serious production of the human intellect for morbid and monstrous extravagance of horrible impossibility. Some invention perhaps might be recovered from the earliest and most frantic romances of Eugène Sue, written in what Dumas has indicated—borrowing a favourite reference from the pure-minded and high-souled Sainte-Beuve—as the Sadique stage of that novelist's youthful inspiration, which if set beside this young imagination of Wordsworth's might seem, in point of sheer moral monstrosity, to come as near it 'as moonlight unto sunlight, or as water unto wine.' Or if Byron had ever carried out his vague design to dramatize the last stages of the life of the Emperor Tiberius—to 'extract a something, of *my* tragic, at least, out of the gloomy sequestration and old age of the tyrant—and even out of his sojourn at Capreæ (!)—by softening the *details*, and exhibiting the despair which must have led to those very vicious pleasures'—we might undoubtedly, had the poet succeeded in preserving the moral effect of 'such solitary horrors' while expunging their loathsomer aspects of physical abomination, have rejoiced in the possession of a tragedy as eccentric and abnormal in its motive and its morality as Wordsworth's. This is the story: a virtuous young man, misguided by false information, has been led into the folly of committing a peculiarly cruel and cold-blooded murder on the person of an innocent friend. The virtuous young man, on discovering his regrettable error, is for a time, not unnaturally, dejected and despondent: but a sudden and a happy thought crosses

his mind: he will seek out some younger and yet more virtuous man, and induce him by similar misrepresentations to commit a yet more cruel and a yet more cold-blooded murder on the person of some yet more unoffending victim than his own: and then there will be two of them, in Mr. Pecksniff's moving phrase, to walk the world together. This brilliant idea is as happily carried into execution as it was ingeniously conceived: the second young man is induced, by a judicious appeal to the finest emotions of his moral nature, to murder the blind old father of his betrothed bride by leaving him to die of exposure and starvation in a moorland wilderness. Now I will not ask whether or not this is a probable or a pleasing or a proper subject for tragic poetry: but from the purely ethical or moral point of view I should really be curious to see its parallel, in any branch of any literature, as a sample of the monstrous and the morbid. 'Il n'y a que les poëtes vertueux,' says a French critic of my acquaintance, 'pour avoir de ces idées-là.' It is in no spirit of irreverence towards the august memory of its author that I refer to a work which is usually and discreetly passed over in expressive silence by the disciples who preach to us his gospel: but when a poem written at the age of twenty and never designed for publication is cited as a typical example of another and a greater poet's powers, I must be allowed to observe that however unjust and however absurd it would be to cite this play of *The Borderers*, completed by Wordsworth at the age of twenty-six and published by Wordsworth at the age of seventy-two, as an adequate and important specimen of his work, it is a hundred times more unjust and it is a thousand times more absurd to

cite the poem of *Queen Mab* as an adequate and important specimen of Shelley's. And none but a very rash and a very ignorant partisan will venture to deny that if this burlesque experiment in unnatural horror had been attempted by any poet of less orthodox and correct reputation in ethics and theology than Wordsworth's, the general verdict of critical morality would almost certainly have described it and dismissed it as the dream of a probably incurable and possibly a criminal lunatic. I am very far from thinking that this would have been a justifiable or a reasonable verdict: but I have no manner of doubt that it would have been a popular one. And when Shelley wrote the greatest tragedy that had been written in any language for upwards of two centuries, he was just one year older than was Wordsworth when he perpetrated this hysterical and spasmodic eccentricity of moral and imaginative perversion. Upon the whole, I venture to think that the Wordsworthians, from Sir Henry Taylor[1] to Mr. Matthew Arnold, might not unreasonably be counselled —if it were not now too late—to break themselves of a habit in which they have hitherto been prone to indulge —the habit of girding and gibing at Shelley as a morbid and delirious visionary, notable mainly for fantastic feebleness of moral idea and uncertain hold on moral fact: a nervous, unmanly, unnatural, unreal, unwholesome sort of poet. A man might be capable of aberrations as strange and fantastic as the wildest passing theories of Shelley, and yet incapable of conceptions so perversely and abnormally horrible as inspired the tragic Muse of Wordsworth and compelled the prostrate

[1] See Appendix II. page 371.

admiration of Coleridge. On the other hand it may be argued that this merely negative advantage on Shelley's side can weigh little or nothing against the positive superiority of Wordsworth in successful treatment of the most vital problems which a man has to face in the conduct of life or the development of thought. 'Neither Byron nor Shelley,' says Mr. Leslie Stephen, 'can see any satisfactory solution, and therefore neither can reach a perfect harmony of feeling. A true man ought not to sit down and weep with an exhausted debauchee.' Certainly he ought not: and had not Byron's better moods, and above all the very latest utterance of his nobler spirit in the highest key of verse to which he could attain, borne witness that he was capable of something better than 'sensual caterwauling' in the gutters of a questionable pleasure-house, there would be nothing to plead on Byron's behalf against this far from soft impeachment. 'He cannot afford,' proceeds the ablest exponent of 'Wordsworth's ethics,' 'to confess himself beaten with the idealist who has discovered that Rome was not built in a day, nor revolutions made with rose-water.' But does Shelley confess himself beaten? He may express at times a wish that the bitter cup of which all such men as he have drunken and must drink, that the cup of disappointment and dejection may, if it be possible, pass from him: but he is no more 'beaten'—no more abased, unmanned, discouraged or disenchanted—no more reduced to submissive despair or spirit-broken acquiescence—than Milton after the Restoration or Hugo during the second empire. And, since the Wordsworthians will not permit us to blink such questions and eschew such comparisons as may hardly redound to

their master's credit so greatly as they seem to think, it must be asked by some who would be the last to deny that it is indeed 'an accursed thing to gaze on prosperous tyrants' of the Napoleonic type 'with a dazzled eye,' whether it is at all a less accursed thing to gaze with a complacent eye on tyrants of a type devoid even of Napoleonic pretention to glory—on such a government as befouled Great Britain and Ireland under the last and loathsomest of the very Georges? It is of course to Wordsworth's credit that the prestigious influence which turned the heads and perverted the hearts of the Byrons and the Hazlitts of his day with factitious and flatulent admiration of their country's enemy should have taken no effect on his saner and manlier habit of mind: but it is equally of course to Wordsworth's discredit—if we must needs take these matters into account—that he should have wanted the good sense, the high principle, the far-sighted and impartial reason, which made the Holy Alliance appear to men like Landor more despicable than Bonaparte and no less hateful than Napoleon.

Mr. Arnold, with the exquisite sagacity which distinguishes his judgment when undisturbed by the instinct for paradox and undiscoloured by the influence of prepossessions, bids us be on our guard against the pretentions of his brother Wordsworthians to establish the fame of Wordsworth as a poet on the foundation of his merit as a teacher of ethics or philosophy. Had a younger voice than Mr. Arnold's, or one whose utterance carried with it less weight of authority than his, presumed to offer such an opinion or suggest such a warning, an instant retort would have rung from every

corner of the critical camp, to the effect that this audacious objector had succeeded only in displaying the shallowness of intelligence which accompanies, indicates, and chastises such laxity or perversity of the moral sense, such blindness or such impotence of spiritual perception or feeling, as could alone have emboldened him to maintain so insolent and obtuse a fallacy. But the most blatant of wrangling moralists will hardly impute Mr. Arnold's view of the subject to any such infirmity of inner vision or natural obliquity of mind. And the few sentences which follow, transcribed from the preface to his admirable volume of selections from Wordsworth, express the exact truth with such absolute precision of justice that no other words could hope to convey it as forcibly or as finally as these.

'We must be on our guard against the Wordsworthians, if we want to secure for Wordsworth his due rank as a poet. The Wordsworthians are apt to praise him for the wrong things, and to lay far too much stress on what they call his philosophy. His poetry is the reality, his philosophy,—so far, at least, as it may put on the form and habit of "a scientific system of thought," and the more that it puts them on,—is the illusion. Perhaps we shall one day learn to make this proposition general, and to say: Poetry is the reality, philosophy the illusion. But in Wordsworth's case, at any rate, *we cannot do him justice until we dismiss his formal philosophy.*'

It was Augustine, I believe, who invoked in jest or in earnest a curse on those who had anticipated him in the utterance of his ideas: a sentiment very worthy of the antichristian who maintained, in contradiction to the divinest word ever uttered upon earth, that 'of such' as

little children was not 'the kingdom of heaven' but the vestibule of hell. For my part, I would rather invoke a blessing on any one who has done me the great and most thankworthy service of saying in better words than mine, and with more authority than I could hope to command, what otherwise I should have striven to say in language less effective and phrase less memorable than his. Here at length is the first thoroughly right thing said about Wordsworth, the first thoroughly right note sounded in his praise, that ever—if I may venture to speak my mind—has touched the key in which the final judgment of the future will express its decision in favour and in honour of this great and misappreciated poet. His earlier disciples or believers, from the highest to the lowest in point of intelligence—from a young man like Mr. Henry Taylor to a young man like Mr. Frederick Faber,—all were misled, as it seems to my humble understanding, by their more or less practical consent to accept Wordsworth's own point of view as the one and only proper or adequate outlook from which to contemplate the genius and the work, the aim and the accomplishment of Wordsworth. Not that he did wrong to think himself a great teacher: he was a teacher no less beneficent than great: but he was wrong in thinking himself a poet because he was a teacher, whereas in fact he was a teacher because he was a poet. This radical and incurable error vitiated more than half his theory of poetry and impaired more than half his practice. So much at least, if not something more, is equally deplorable and true: but when it has been duly admitted and deplored, the majestic and inviolable figure of his fame which remains standing, unshaken and un-

sullied, above all but the great and beside all but the greatest of his kind, towers high enough to darken and to dwarf the pretentions of the Byrons and the Southeys in scarcely less degree than itself is overtopped and overshadowed by the proportions of Homer or of Shakespeare.

It is with poetry—though few seem practically inclined to admit this—as it is with any other art: the fewest possible touches, the slightest possible shades of colour or of sound, suffice to show, what all the explanation and demonstration in the world will fail to demonstrate or explain, the rank and character of the genius which inspired them. If there were no more left us of Wordsworth than is left us of Sappho, but if these relics were fragmentary examples of the poet at his best, it would be waste of breath to argue, when none who knew anything of poetry could choose but see, that here had been a poet in time past, the latchet of whose shoes a Byron or one greater than a Byron would not have been worthy to stoop down and unloose.

When the highest intelligence enlisted in the service of the higher criticism has done all it can ever aim at doing in exposition of the highest things in art, there remains always something unspoken and something undone which never in any way can be done or spoken. The full cause of the full effect achieved by poetry of the first order can be defined and expounded with exact precision and certitude of accuracy by no strength of argument or subtlety of definition. All that exists of good in the best work of a Byron or a Southey can be defined, expounded, justified and classified by judicious admiration, with no fear lest anything noticeable or laudable should evade the analytic apprehension of

critical goodwill. No one can mistake what there is to admire, no one can want words to define what it is that he admires, in the forcible and fervent eloquence of a poem so composed of strong oratorical effects arranged in vigorous and telling succession as Byron's *Isles of Greece*. There is not a single point missed that an orator on the subject would have aimed at making: there is not a touch of rhetoric that would not, if delivered under favourable circumstances, have brought down the house or shaken the platform with a thunder-peal of prolonged and merited applause. It is almost as effective, and as genuine in its effect, as anything in *Absalom and Achitophel*, or *The Medal*, or *The Hind and the Panther*. It is Dryden—and Dryden at his best—done out of couplets into stanzas. That is the very utmost that Byron could achieve; as the very utmost to which Southey could attain was the noble and pathetic epitome of history, with its rapid and vivid glimpses of tragic action and passion, cast into brief elegiac form in his monody on the Princess Charlotte. And the merits of either are as easily definable as they are obvious and unmistakable. The same thing may be said of Wordsworth's defects: it cannot be said of Wordsworth's merits. The test of the highest poetry is that it eludes all tests. Poetry in which there is no element at once perceptible and indefinable by any reader or hearer of any poetic instinct may have every other good quality; it may be as nobly ardent and invigorating as the best of Byron's, or as nobly mournful and contemplative as the best of Southey's: if all its properties can easily or can ever be gauged and named by their admirers, it is not poetry—above all, it is not lyric poetry—of the first water. There must be some-

thing in the mere progress and resonance of the words, some secret in the very motion and cadence of the lines, inexplicable by the most sympathetic acuteness of criticism. Analysis may be able to explain how the colours of this flower of poetry are created and combined, but never by what process its odour is produced. Witness the first casual instance that may be chosen from the wide high range of Wordsworth's.

> Will no one tell me what she sings?
> Perhaps the plaintive numbers flow
> For old, unhappy, far-off things,
> And battles long ago.

If not another word were left of the poem in which these two last lines occur, those two lines would suffice to show the hand of a poet differing not in degree but in kind from the tribe of Byron or of Southey. In the whole expanse of poetry there can hardly be two verses of more perfect and profound and exalted beauty. But if anybody does not happen to see this, no critic of all that ever criticized, from the days of Longinus to the days of Arnold, from the days of Zoilus to the days of Zola, could succeed in making visible the certainty of this truth to the mind's eye of that person. And this, if the phrase may for once be used without conveying a taint of affectation—this is the mystery of Wordsworth: that none of all great poets was ever so persuaded of his capacity to understand and his ability to explain how his best work was done, his highest effect attained, his deepest impression conveyed; and yet there never was a poet whose power, whose success, whose unquestionable triumph was more independent of all his theories, more inexplicable by any of his rules. Did we

accept and apply to his own work the definitions he gives us of his object and the tests which these offer of his success or unsuccess, we could not but reject some of his noblest work as insufficient or improper, while awarding the honours of a preposterous acclamation to some of his most absolute and hopeless failures. There is hardly in any literature a poem of more perfect power, more awful and triumphant beauty, than *The Affliction of Margaret*: yet it is impossible to cross or contravene the critical judgment which refuses to this monologue the praise which it assigns to that of Tennyson's modern Rizpah—the praise of utter and poignant fidelity to possible and indisputable fact. Not the most exclusive disciple of the elder laureate will affirm that he has come as near as high poetry can come to the actual expression of very life itself in consummate and impeccable simplicity of tragic truth: not the dullest or most malignant of detractors will deny that his successor has done so. In the pathos and the passion of naked nature the later is above all comparison with the earlier poem: but in the quality at which Wordsworth forbade his disciples to aim, as he abjured for himself all pretention to aim at it—in sublimity of poetic diction and expression he is here so far above Tennyson as to recall and indeed to rival the very loftiest magnificence of Milton or of Shakespeare. Inheritance of the lion's den,—an incommunicable sleep, —such phrases are doubtless as strange to an old countrywoman's vocabulary as the language of Lear to the lips of a savage British chief, as the language of Macbeth to the lips of a savage Scottish thane: but then, as translations of natural thought and feeling into the sovereign style, the eternal and universal dialect, of

imaginative and passionate poetry, they are no less true than these to a higher standard than the standard of realistic or literal veracity. Indeed, though on this point I cannot venture to differ from Mr. Arnold's estimate without a cordial sense of diffidence and reluctance, it does not seem to me that the highest distinctive qualities of Wordsworth's genius are to be found in what is usually considered his most characteristic work. In homely accuracy and simplicity he is equalled by Cowper and distanced by Burns: for the great Scotchman is not more certainly his superior in humour, animation, and variety than in vivid veracity of accurate and sympathetic representation. Few poets were ever less realistic than Milton: few at least ever depended less on accuracy of transcription from the simple truth and modesty of nature for the accomplishment of their highest and most abiding aims: and yet the place of Wordsworth, whose own professed aim was to study and to reproduce in the effects of his verse the effects of nature in their most actual simplicity, is rather with Milton or with Pindar than with Cowper or with Burns. He wants indeed the constancy of impulse, the certitude of achievement, the steadfastness of inspiration, by which Pindar and Milton are exalted and sustained through the whole course of their spiritual flight from summit to summit of majestic imagination and moral ardour; their sovereign sway and masterdom lay hardly within reach of his less imperial spirit: the ethics of Wordsworth are scarcely so solid and profound as theirs, so deeply based on righteousness and reality, on principles of truth and manhood invariable and independent of custom or theology, of tradition and of time. But

is there anything in modern poetry so Pindaric—in other words, is there anything at once so exalted and so composed, so ardent and serene, so full of steadfast light and the flameless fire of imaginative thought, as the hymn which assigns to the guardianship of Duty or everlasting law the fragrance of the flowers on earth and the splendour of the stars in heaven? Here at least his conception of duty, of righteousness, and of truth is one with the ideal of Æschylus, of Alighieri, and of Hugo: no less positive and pure, no more conventional or accidental than is theirs. And in a lesser lyric than this we find the same spontaneous and sublime perfection of inspired workmanship. None but a poet of the first order could have written the eight lines in which the unforeseeing security of a charmed and confident happiness is opposed to the desolate certitude of unforeseen bereavement by a single touch of contrast, a single note of comparison, as profound in its simplicity as the deepest wellspring of human emotion or remembrance itself. No elaboration of elegiac lament could possibly convey that sense of absolute and actual truth, of a sorrow set to music of its own making,—a sorrow hardly yet wakened out of wonder into sense of its own reality,—which is impressed at once and for ever on the spirit of any reader, at any age, by those eight faultless and incomparable verses.

As the poet of high-minded loyalty to his native land, Wordsworth stands alone above all his compeers and successors: royalist and conservative as he appeared, he never really ceased, while his power of song was unimpaired, to be in the deepest and most literal sense a republican; a citizen to whom the commonweal—the

'common good of all,' for which Shakespeare's ideal patriot shed Cæsar's blood less willingly than his own—was the one thing worthy of any man's and all men's entire devotion. The depth and intensity, the fixity and the fervour of his interest in personal suffering and individual emotion did but help to build up, to fortify and consolidate, this profound and lofty patriotism. But in what we may call his more private capacity as a poet the most especial and distinctive quality of his genius is rather its pathetic than its introspective, its tragic than its philosophic note. A poet of action he never claimed or wished to be: as a poet of introspection, of spiritual insight or ethical doctrine, he has been—if it may be said without irreverence—perhaps alike overrated by others and by himself: but as the poet of suffering, and of sympathy with suffering, his station is unequalled in its kind. Here, except when he is floated away on the unconfined and wide-weltering waters of his limitless blank verse, he scarcely ever seems to me—as even to Mr. Arnold I find that he sometimes seems—to go wrong. Like those English settlers in Ireland who became *ipsis Hibernis Hiberniores*, I find myself on this point more Wordsworthian than the most eminent of contemporary Wordsworthians. He complains that his fellow-disciples 'will speak with the same reverence of *The Sailor's Mother*, for example, as of *Lucy Gray*. They do their master harm by such lack of discrimination. *Lucy Gray* is a beautiful success: *The Sailor's Mother* is a failure.' To me I must admit that it seems the finer success of the two: the deeper in its pathos, the more enduring in its effect, the happier if also the more venturous in its simplicity. But on the other hand Mr. Arnold places at

the close of the narrative poems elected by him for especial honour, as a crowning example of Wordsworth's excellence in that line, the first book of the *Excursion*, detached from the others and presented under the title of *Margaret* as a separate and independent idyl, side by side with the faultless and ever memorable poem of *Michael*. It is through no pleasure in contradiction, but with genuine reluctance to differ from the majority of Wordsworth's ablest and most sympathetic admirers, that I say what I have always thought, when I avow an opinion that as surely as *Michael* is a beautiful success, *Margaret* is a failure. Its idyllic effect is not heightened but impaired by the semi-dramatic form of narrative—a form so generally alien to Wordsworth's genius that its adoption throughout so great a part of the *Excursion* would of itself suffice at once to establish and to explain the inferiority of that poem to the *Prelude*. But in this particular instance the narrative drags even more heavily than in the case which affords Mr. Arnold a single exception to his practical rule of universal tolerance or enjoyment. He can read, he tells us, with pleasure and edification, everything of Wordsworth, except *Vaudracour and Julia*. Certainly that episode is a somewhat 'heavy-gaited' and torpid offspring of the poet's blameless Muse: but this is not the only occasion on which she seems to stand sorely in need of a shove from some critical Baxter of more potent and more dexterous hand than Jeffrey. Whatever of interest or pathos there may be in the Wanderer's record of Margaret's troubles is fairly swamped in a watery world of words as monotonous and colourless as drizzling mist. The story would be sad enough, if there were any story to tell:

and Wordsworth, in his 'wiser mind,' might have turned the subject to some elegiac account: but all the main effect—in spite of certain details and certain passages or phrases impossible to any but a master of pathetic emotion—is washed away by the drowsy and dreary overflow of verses without limit or landmark. The truth is that Wordsworth, of all poets worthy to be named in the same day with him, stood the most in need of artificial confinement and support to prevent his work from sprawling into shapeless efflorescence and running to unprofitable seed; though, if any one were to speak of his blank verse in a tone of sweeping and intemperate irreverence, no doubt the great names of Lorton Vale and Tintern Abbey would rise up before all our memories to shame the speaker into silence: Milton alone could surpass, perhaps Milton alone has equalled, the very finest work of his great disciple in this majestic kind: the music of some few almost incomparable passages seems to widen and deepen the capacity of the sense for reception and enjoyment and understanding of the sublimest harmonies. And outside the range of blank verse it is not of Milton only that the genius of Wordsworth at its highest should remind us: it is not with Milton's only that this genius may profitably be compared. Wordsworth, says Mr. Arnold, is not of the same order with the great poets who made such verse as he takes to represent at its best and highest the special genius, the typical force, of Homer, of Dante, or of Shakespeare. A poet of the same order with these, or with such sovereign masters of lyric style as Pindar and Coleridge and Shelley, he may not be—I should say myself that he most unquestionably was not: but if

we look to detached lines and phrases,—a method greatly favoured and skilfully practised by Mr. Arnold, —there is no poet of any time or nation beside whom Wordsworth need fear to stand. There is nothing of style, in the highest sense, more Shakespearean in Shakespeare than such a turn of expression as 'the engines of her pain, the tools that shaped her sorrow:' there is nothing outside Æschylus so Æschylean as the magnificent and daring accuracy of the single epithet which brings before us a whole charge of storming breakers as they crowd and crash upon each other. No type has ever so well represented, none could possibly represent so well, the furious confusion and the headlong pressure of their onset, as that one word which makes us hear and see, across wind and lightning, the very sound and likeness of the 'trampling waves.' All that Wordsworth could do—and the author of the *Excursion* could do much—to make us forget his genius is itself forgotten when such a line, such a single phrase as this, revives in our memory the vibration of its music, the illumination of its truth. Forty thousand Byrons could not, with all their quantity of fustian, make up the sum of poetic eloquence—an eloquence born of faithful and joyful insight, of fancy-fed but fervent loyalty to nature, and to the style whose art itself is nature—which is comprised in this one line of Wordsworth's. Nor need we look only to single lines or stanzas for proof of the poet's occasional or momentary equality with the greatest: the one little nameless poem to which I but now referred as incomparable has a lyric perfection and purity of ring not surpassed by any single note of Shelley's, with a depth and gravity of emotion sup-

pressed in the very act of expression to which I can remember no parallel in the range of song. 'If I had,' as Mr. Arnold puts it, 'to pick out poems of a kind most perfectly to show Wordsworth's unique power,' I should choose this one of all his shorter lyrics as distinctly unequalled by any other of them for exaltation and condensation of strength: while among his longer poems I should find it 'hard—almost impossible'—to make so positive a choice. But assuredly I should place on the one hand the *Ode to Duty*, on the other hand the *Song at the Feast of Brougham Castle*, as instances of decisive and perfect success, high—upon the whole—above the *Ode on Intimations of Immortality*. That famous, ambitious, and occasionally magnificent poem—which by the way is no more an ode than it is an epic—reveals the partiality and inequality of Wordsworth's inspiration as unmistakably as its purity and its power. Five stanzas or sections—from the opening of the fifth to the close of the ninth—would be utterly above all praise, if the note they are pitched in were sustained throughout: but after its unspeakably beautiful opening the seventh stanza falls suddenly far down beneath the level of those five first lines, so superb in the majesty of their sweetness, the magnificence of their tenderness, that to have written but the two last of them would have added glory to any poet's crown of fame. The details which follow on the close of this opening cadence do but impair its charm with a sense of incongruous realism and triviality, to which the suddenly halting and disjointed metre bears only too direct and significant a correspondence. No poet, surely, ever 'changed his hand' with such inharmonious awkwardness, or

'checked his pride' with such unseasonable humility, as Wordsworth. He of all others should have been careful to eschew the lawless discord of Cowley's 'immetrical' irregularity: for, to say the least, he had not enough of 'music in himself' to supply in any measure or degree whatever the lack of ordered rhythm and lyric law. Coleridge alone of all our poets ever wrote a single poem of any length which was also a poem of even and harmonious excellence in that illegitimate and anarchic fashion—for method it is none; Dryden and Wordsworth alike, and Keats no less than Shelley, fell short of this unique and unqualified success: and even so great a poem as *Dejection* is certainly less great by far than the same poet's ode on France. But if any proof were needed by any human intelligence or any human ear of the necessity for a law of harmony, the advantage of a method and a principle in even the most 'unpremeditated art,' no better proof could be required than a comparison of the poem last named with its sister ode 'on the departing year,' or of the regular with the irregular lyrics in *Hellas* or *Prometheus Unbound*. And if even Shelley, and if even Coleridge himself, all but omnipotent gods of song and utterly unapproachable in masterdom of music as they were, could not do their very best when working without a limit and singing without a law, how much less could any such miracle be expected from the far less infallible voice, the far less wonder-working hand of Wordsworth? In so short a poem as the address *To Hartley Coleridge, six years old*, irregularity has a charm of its own: but that incomparable little masterpiece makes no pretention to the structure of a regular ode: and in

any case it could be no more than an exception which would prove the rule. That unique power of which Mr. Arnold speaks so happily and so truly is nowhere displayed in more absolute purity of perfection than in those divine and enchanting verses. The peculiar note of Wordsworth's genius at its very highest is that of sublimity in tenderness. On this point again we must look only to the very highest poets of all for a parallel to this great, though most unequal and uncertain, most lawless and irregular poet. The pathos of Homer and Æschylus, of Shakespeare and Hugo, is not merely allied or associated with sublimity, it is itself sublime. Coleridge, a name second to none of all time for splendour and sweetness of inspiration, is tender and sublime alternately; Wordsworth at his best is sublime by the very force of his tenderness. And sometimes, even where no such profound note of emotion is touched as to evoke this peculiar sense of power, the utter sincerity and perfect singleness of heart and spirit by which that highest effect is elsewhere produced may be no less distinctly and no less delightedly recognized. This quality of itself is no doubt insufficient to produce any such effect: and Wordsworth, it may be confessed, was liable to failure as complete as might have been expected, when, having no other merit of subject or of treatment to rely on, he was content to rely on his sincerity and simplicity alone; with a result sometimes merely trivial and unmeritable, sometimes actually repulsive or oppressive. At other times again the success of his method, or rather perhaps the felicity of his instinct, was no less absolute and complete, even when the homeliness or humility of the subject chosen would

have seemed incompatible with loftiness of feeling or grandeur of style. All readers who know good work when they see it must appreciate the beauty of his *Tribute to the Memory of a Dog*: all must feel the truth and the sweetness of its simplicity: but hardly any, I should suppose, have perceived on a first reading how grand it is—how noble, how lofty, how exalted, is the tone of its emotion. Here is that very sublimity of tenderness which I have ventured to indicate as Wordsworth's distinctive and crowning quality: a quality with which no other poet could have imbued his verse on such a subject and escaped all risk of apparent incongruity or insincerity. To praise a poem of this class on the score of dignity would seem to imply its deficiency in the proper and necessary qualities of simplicity and tenderness: yet here the loftier quality seems to grow as naturally as a flower out of the homelier and humbler element of feeling and expression. On the other hand, it seems to me undeniable that Wordsworth, who could endow such daily domestic matters, such modest emotion and experience, with a force of contagious and irresistible sympathy which makes their interest universal and eternal, had no such birthright of power, showed no such certitude of hand, when dealing with the proper and natural elements of tragedy. A subject of such naked and untempered horror as he attempted to manage in his semi-dramatic idyl of *The Thorn*—one of the poems elected by himself for especial mention as a representative example of his work, and of its guiding principle,—instead of being harmonized by his genius into tragic and pitiful and terrible beauty, retains in his hands the whole ghastliness and dreadful-

ness of a merely shocking and hideous reality. Had Victor Hugo chosen such a subject, his poem when first read would have produced, it may be, an effect as harrowing as Wordsworth's: but at every fresh reading the sense of beauty would have grown upon us, the sense of horror would have waned; till at last the impression of pain was utterly effaced and absorbed in an emotion of pure and high delight—such delight as takes deepest root in the seed-plot of deepest tragedy. But here on a sixth or seventh reading the effect remains identical—an effect of unmodified and haunting horror. This poem is among idyls what *A Yorkshire Tragedy* is among plays: and the abuse of misapplied power is more obvious—not to say, more offensive—in the idyllic than in the dramatic form of art. Wordsworth has explained, with curious and characteristic particularity, his conception of the imaginary spokesman who is supposed to be fond of relating such an episode of rural tragedy, and prone to expatiate with punctilious and methodical persistency on all its dismal and miserable details: and the result produced, I should suppose, in the mind of almost any possible reader, is a sense that if living in his neighbourhood he would have been careful to give that retired mariner the widest possible berth on all conceivable occasions; and this in spite of the wonderful touch and flash of poetic imagination which all Wordsworth's intense and concentrated self-will could not enable him utterly to suppress or persistently to subdue. For that must be, I should imagine, a most exceptional corner of the country, in which one is liable to fall in with a merchant captain retired from business, and given to spinning the longest yarns out of the

blackest thread of tragedy, who lets drop in the course of his oceanic and illimitable garrulity such a pearl of imaginative expression as this :

> At all times of the day and night
> This wretched Woman thither goes ;
> *And she is known to every star,*
> *And every wind that blows.*

Those two lines alone, however dramatically and rationally improper, are genuinely and poetically impressive : the effect of the whole is not : it is purely and prosaically oppressive, dismal as the greyest of Scotch mists, or even as the yellowest of London fogs : the lungs of the imagination are clogged with a sense as of damp and dense depression while we read it. Coleridge, in his otherwise Wordsworthian poem of *The Three Graves*, has shown how a subject of homely horror, a tale of humble and simple wickedness, of simple and humble suffering, may be treated with poetic propriety and with tragic exactitude : the garrulity of his narrator is almost as realistic as that of Wordsworth's, and quite as realistic as any form of serious poetry will properly allow : but it is not crude, it is not repulsive, and it is not tedious : it has nothing but what is merely external in common with such a poem as *The Thorn*.

But only for an instant can it ever be forgotten or can it ever seem doubtful that to Wordsworth above all other poets might have been addressed that superb apostrophe—

> Tu donnes pour mesure, en tes ardentes luttes,
> À la hauteur des bonds la profondeur des chutes.

Every such instance of his inability to realize his favourite ideal of realism throws into more vivid relief

his imperial mastery of command in a far higher field of art than this. The very year which produced such doleful examples of eccentricity in dullness—relieved by hardly a touch here and there of attentive tenderness and truth—as *The Thorn* and *The Idiot Boy*, produced also the imperishable poem on Tintern Abbey: a poem which wants but the excision of one or two futile phrases, the reconstruction of two or three nerveless lines, to make perfect and unquestionable the justice of its claim to be ranked with the most triumphant successes of English poetry. Again, among the *Memorials of a Tour in Scotland*, 1803, we find side by side the astonishing admonition 'to the sons of Burns'—astonishing no less for its unutterable platitude of expression than for the taste which could dictate such a style of address on such an occasion—and the four glorious poems which give back with such serene perfection of stately ease and high simplicity the very spirit of the Highlands in their severe peace and bright austerity of summer. In the lines *To a Highland Girl*, in *Glen Almain*, *Stepping Westward*, and *The Solitary Reaper*, the purest note of Wordsworth's genius is discernible in such fullness and sweetness of fervent thought and majestic sympathy, that the neighbourhood of any verse less noble than this is yet more inexplicable than regrettable. Two of these, *Glen Almain* and the *Reaper*, are throughout as perfect examples of the author's metrical instinct as of his peculiar tone of meditation: a point of as much or as little importance to a poet's work as is the command of line and colour to a painter's.

> He sang of battles, and the breath
> Of stormy war, and violent death:

there is a simple-sounding couplet, with no very definable quality of musical expression in its cadence; yet the reader who should fail to recognize in it the distinguishing note of Wordsworth's power would at once prove himself incompetent as a judge of poetic style. And in such lines—austere, august, but sweet beyond the most polished and perfumed verse of any more obviously elaborate melodist—all the best poems representative of Wordsworth are rich enough to satisfy any taste unspoilt by too much indulgence in metrical confectionary. Wordsworth was so great a master of the strict and regular octosyllabic measure, that at times its proverbially 'fatal facility' seems in his hands alone to have lost all danger: its fluency gains strength and weight, its ease assumes gravity and grandeur. It is just and fit, therefore, that the noblest tribute ever paid to his name should be couched in verses not only worthy of his own hand, but written in this very simple and very exacting metre; so easy to work in badly, and so hard to work in well, that perhaps one poet alone has learnt all the effect of its elegiac resources from this master of the difficult and simple secret. Whether we do or do not agree at all points with the pupil as critic or commentator, it is none the less undeniable that the perfect, the final, the supreme praise of Wordsworth will always be sought, always cherished, and always enjoyed in Mr. Arnold's memorial verses on his death. Here if anywhere is the right chord struck, the just and exact meed of honour assigned to a poet whose work was for so long the object of blundering blame and no less blundering praise. 'Wordsworth's healing power,' his gift of direct or indirect refreshment, the comfort and support

of his perfect and pure sincerity in all his dealings with nature, can best be felt, can only perhaps be felt in full, when we consent to forget and succeed in forgetting his excursion or excursions into the preacher's province, a territory dense and dubious with didactic quags and theosophic briars. In his own far loftier land of natural contemplation, when least meditative with any prepense or prefixed purpose, he could do such work and give such gifts as no other poet has given or has done. It was not when engaged in backing the Wanderer's moral paces against those of the heavily handicapped Solitary, or in reinforcing the verbose reiterations of that inexhaustible itinerant with the yet more indefatigable infacundity poured forth upon 'the pensive Sceptic' by 'the philosophic Priest,' that Wordsworth was either a prophet or a poet. He sees deepest when he flies highest: and this, if I mistake not, is never in the *Excursion*, seldom in the *Prelude*, often in his earlier sonnets, and oftenest perhaps of all in such poems as partake almost equally of the lyric and the elegiac tone. In such a poem, for example, as *Resolution and Independence*, there is a breath of prouder music, a ring of keener sound, than we expect or admit in elegy: it has more in its highest notes of the quality proper to lyric style—when the lyrist is likewise a thinker: to the lyric style of Sophocles or Pindar. And only in such work as the highest and rarest even of theirs may any one think to find the like of such a verse as this:—

The sleepless soul that perished in its pride.

I will back that against any of Mr. Arnold's three representative quotations from Homer, from Dante, and from

Shakespeare. It is like nothing from any other hand: the unspeakable greatness of its quality is Wordsworth's alone: and I doubt if it would really be as rash as it might seem to maintain that there is not and will never be a greater verse in all the world of song.

And this, it should be duly borne in mind, is not an eccentric and incongruous exception, such as proves the rule of dullness in the work of many a toilsome writer who in the course of his life's labour on stony or sandy or miry soil may once or twice have hit upon something like a gem. This is a superb but hardly an unique example of Wordsworth's peculiar power; of the true, the sublime and profound genius which redeems all his unaccountable shortcomings and effaces all recollection of his besetting and obtrusive infirmities; and which may well make us unwilling to be reminded that, in justice to the claims of even greater men—and these assuredly are but a small minority on the roll of illustrious names,—we must not forget how bad, how very bad, is a very considerable portion of his work: if ever tempted to do so, we need only open the *Excursion* at random, and the *Sortes Wordsworthianæ* will too probably lay before our shuddering sight such an example as this, which the chance of random consultation has just brought under mine:—

> 'Though,' said the Priest in answer, 'these be terms
> Which a divine philosophy rejects,
> We, whose established and unfailing trust
> Is in controlling Providence, admit
> That, through all stations, human life abounds
> With mysteries.'

And we, whose delight in the noble genius of

Wordsworth is an established and unfailing source of reverential gratitude, admit that, through all recesses of rubbish, nothing more portentously abject in expression can be sought for with any plausible hope of success than this insuperable if not incomparable instance of ponderosity in platitude. It is remarkable that so great a poet and so religious a man as Wordsworth should usually have shown himself one of the feeblest and flattest of religious poetasters. Not to speak of the holy Herberts and the saintly Vaughans of an earlier age, Kit Smart, who drank himself into a madhouse, and died there in the year made memorable by the birth of Wordsworth, wrote under these rather inauspicious conditions a sacred poem of such pure and rich and fervent eloquence as to outsoar the highest flight that Wordsworth's Muse could attain when her wings were imped with plumes of religious doctrine—or rather, shall we say, clogged by the spiritual birdlime of a stupefying cant? And if more recent and more respectable instances of triumphant success in this field of poetry should be required by way of contrast or relief to the comparative or positive failure of Wordsworth as a religious poet, we need but refer to two yet living English writers of the highest distinction, respectively representing two diverse forms of the Christian creed, for examples of cognate and coequal excellence. The force, the fervour, the terse energy of Cardinal Newman's verse at its best, add to the sincerity and simplicity of an apparently spontaneous expression that vivid and masculine plenitude of life which ceases to distinguish the style of Wordsworth whenever—to use a somewhat more than familiar phrase—he drops into theology ; and

there are moments when a genuine lyric note—as in *The Zeal of Jehu*—or some graver and less impulsive though not less ardent strain of rhymed or rhymeless iambics—as here and there in *The Dream of Gerontius*—makes us question whether something of truer poetic force than we are wont to admire in the finest examples of his eloquence may not have been spilt on the sands or lost among the thickets of what seems to the most respectful of such admiring students as cannot call themselves disciples a radically and essentially Pyrrhonistic system of theosophy, hiding at once and revealing the bottomless pit of ethical unbelief—of moral and spiritual nihilism, bridged and vaulted by œcumenical architects with an artificial firmament of clouds and creeds. In the sacred verse of Miss Rossetti there is, if not a stronger, a far sweeter and an even purer inspiration. Her verses for Good Friday, and those for the festival of St. Peter, have something more than the finest quality of George Herbert: in *The Three Enemies* there is such condensed and resonant strength of line, with a sweetness so concentrated and distilled from the inmost heart of feeling and meditation, as we find in the similar work of no other hand than hers: and it is little to say that in all the range of English poetry there is no such organ-music of passionate faith and rapturous hope and transcendent love as rings and swells and triumphs through the third of her new-year carols. If a religious poet can show us none of these things, can make us feel for the moment nothing of this kind, his aim is surely missed and his time is sorely wasted. To the Muse of the Anglican poetess as to the Muse of the Catholic prelate doctrine is nothing less than a stimulus: to

Wordsworth's it was nothing less than a torpedo. Nor in the qualities of homeliness and simplicity was he less excelled by his immediate precursor, William Blake; there is no such honey in any hive of Wordsworth's as in the best of that divine dreamer's who could pray no better prayer for a child than that God would make the world as beautiful for her as he had made it for him. The charm of even such a poem as *We are Seven*, delicate and true and tender though it be, is of a kind less rare and exquisite than that which clings about the *Songs of Innocence*.

But if Wordsworth has been excelled in such fields of verse as his disciples and himself were wont to consider peculiarly his own, there is one in which he stood without a peer even among the great men of a generation as rich in heroes as in poets. He was the heroic poet of his age: so long as there lives one man of English blood who has any sense of noble poetry, that blood will thrill and tingle in his veins at the very thought of the trumpet-notes of Wordsworth. His was not such patriotism as begins and ends in shrewish and vulgar scolding at other nations, or in shrill Pharisaic thanksgiving that he and his were not made like other men: his haughty and high-minded confidence in England was but the natural outgrowth of his early sympathy with France, while France was as yet undebased into an empire. 'It is not to be thought of' that ever the day should come when Englishmen will read without a glowing rapture of sympathy and pride the magnificent sonnet which opens with that simple phrase of proud and perfect trust: or when that other yet nobler than this one, 'on the subjugation of Switzerland,' will cease

to vibrate for ever in the ears of all who have not unlearnt at the knees of blustering sophists their inborn love of independence, their inbred faith in freedom. 'What sorrow would it be,' indeed, that such an echo from the two voices of the mountains and the sea as peals through this clarion of verse should ever be stifled by the deep-mouthed dissonance of the false prophets whose trust is in God the Devil—the idol of Calvin as surely as of Torquemada; whose ideal of manly loyalty is the brute submission of a mill-horse to the grinding drill of a slave-driver; whose watchwords are force and cunning, subservience and success! While Wordsworth keeps his place among the most honoured names and memories of his nation, there need be no fear that its poetry should sink to the level of sentimental or servile indifference to manly thought or manful sympathies, its patriotism to the measure of jealous provincial self-esteem, its political philosophy to the abyss of spiritual prostration before the triumphant progress of strong silent men with a lie in their right hands.

Wordsworth is generally—and, it must be said, plausibly—regarded as a type of insularity in sentiment and opinion: yet it was he, in the year of Mazzini's arrival in England, at a time when if ever the prospect of Italian unity and freedom must have seemed hopeless to all but men of exceptionally noble and faithful nature—it was he, conservative and reactionary as he was considered and as he believed himself to be, who unconsciously anticipated the message of Mazzini, the central article of his creed, the belief which was as the hinge or the corner-stone of his teaching, in the sonnet which foretold to Italy 'the third stage of her great

destiny'—the breaking of her double yoke—the hope which in memory of her fortunes, twice exalted, might provoke from poets a glad note of prophecy to salute the coming hour of her resurrection. So true is it that a high-minded man can no more be consistent in an evil creed, or constant to the submissive doctrine whose key-note is degradation and despair, than a base man can be constant to the faith of heroes, or consistent in his advocacy of political or spiritual freedom. The time has been, since the close of Wordsworth's day, when the appeal of his own memorable sonnet to Milton might perhaps with no less propriety have been addressed to him who wrote it: in any case, the spirit and the body of such poems must be alike imperishable, the lesson of their heroic example a possession beyond price for ever. Serene as is the spirit of his teaching, and profound his love of all peaceful things and influences, his note was not always that of the stock-dove brooding over his own sweet voice: though doubtless it never caught the 'tumultuous harmony' of the nightingale's, there were times when it swelled into the strength of a rushing wind, and made the verses ring like storm-swept crannies of the crags and scaurs that nursed the spirit which imbues them. Those other poets of his day who dealt more immediately than he with martial matter had in them less of heroic thought and intelligence than the seemingly self-centred student of uninvaded solitudes. Scott could make men breathe the breath of battle; Byron could only make men smell the reek of carnage; but Wordsworth alone could put into his verse the whole soul of a nation armed or arming for self-devoted self-defence; could fill his meditation with the spirit of a

whole people, that in the act of giving it a voice and an expression he might inform and renovate that spirit with the purity and sublimity of his own. Therefore, and on this account above all others, may his immortal words of sympathy find immortal application to himself: there is not a breathing of the common wind which blows over England that ever shall forget him ; his memory has great allies ; he too has friends in the exultations and the agonies of his fellow men, in their love of country, in the unconquerable mind of his race. He will hardly be reckoned, except by the estimate of his own peculiar sect and following, as 'one of the very chief glories of English poetry:' but he will never be rated at a much lower price than this. The very chief glories of English poetry may claim and may confront comparison with the very greatest of all time: they are 'above all Roman fame,' and worthy, after their own fashion, to share supremacy with the highest of the Hebrews and the Greeks. We must not, I submit, claim a place among these for Wordsworth: but with the Virgils and the Chaucers, with the sage Spenser and the pure Simonides, we may assign him no unequal or undistinguished place. He may never have written anything so perfect in spontaneity of noble style and noble pathos as the divine fragment which makes all boys and men who read it contemporaries for a moment of the Ceian poet by right of rapture and of sympathy: the sorrow of Ruth comes hardly so close to us as the sorrow of Danae: yet we imagine that the elder may have welcomed in Elysium the later poet as a kinsman not unworthy of their clan. I would not dispute the verdict which should assert that a leaf of the Georgics

would outpoise in value the whole of the *Excursion*, with nine-tenths of the *Prelude* thrown in as a make-weight: nor do I question that Wordsworth's Dido would have been but a doleful and dreary shadow of the most passionate and pathetic figure in Latin poetry: and yet, in spite of Virgil's inexpressible advantage in dignity of execution, in stateliness of utterance and shapeliness of style, I doubt whether that master of majestic phrase ever strikes a sentence home to our hearts with such strength of hand and sureness of aim as Wordsworth. Once or twice, indeed, Wordsworth has not only done this, but has done it while observing with an instinctive dignity and precision not unworthy to be called Virgilian the high unwritten laws of great poetic style. Such an example of spontaneous loyalty to those laws of no man's making, which forgetfulness may never but for a season put to sleep—laws wherein the God of song shows himself mighty, and waxes not old—we may discover in that stanza which even a greater than Virgil might have been proud to sign:—

> My apprehensions come in crowds;
> I dread the rustling of the grass;
> The very shadows of the clouds
> Have power to shake me as they pass:
> I question things, and do not find
> One that will answer to my mind;
> And all the world appears unkind.

The piteous and perfect lifelikeness of these magnificent lines every heart and eye of man or woman may recognize: but the lover of poetry whose love is according to knowledge must recognize also their unsurpassable greatness and nobility of style. Such intensity and

earnestness, such ardour and elevation, we do not find in the greatest of our poets before the coming of Marlowe as herald to Shakespeare. On all other points Chaucer is of course almost immeasurably the superior of Wordsworth; in breadth of human interest, in simplicity of varied sympathies, in straightforward and superb command of his materials as an artist, the inspired man of the world as much excels the slow-thoughted and self-studious recluse as in warmth and wealth of humour, in consummate power of narrative, and in childlike manfulness of compassionate or joyous emotion; but their usual relations are reversed when the subject treated by Wordsworth exacts a deeper and intenser expression of feeling, or when his thought takes wing for higher flights of keener speculation, than the strong, elastic, equable movement of Chaucer's thought and verse could be expected to achieve or to attain. In a word, the elder singer has a thousand advantages over the later, but the one point on which the later has the advantage is worth all the rest put together: he is the sublimer poet of the two. Of this quality Spenser had nothing; indeed it may be said that the sublime was first introduced into modern English poetry by the inventor of English blank verse and the creator of English tragedy. This is as certain as that Spenser was incapable of Wordsworth's errors—that his culture, as we should say now, was higher, his instinct happier, his way of work, on the whole, more workmanlike than Wordsworth's. Only, on the other hand, there is this to be taken into account: that all the impeccable facility, all the inexhaustible melody, all the mellifluous fertility of Spenser will not avail to counterweigh, in the estimate

of those who prize most the highest qualities of poetry, that rare, uncertain, intermittent effect of profound and majestic harmony, which Wordsworth, though unable to command his music at will with the assurance of a Milton or a Shelley, does yet sometimes, as by direct and inexplicable intuition, educe from the simplest combinations of evidently spontaneous thought with apparently spontaneous expression. His many and laborious revisions were sometimes of unquestionable advantage to the finish and the solidity of his work: sometimes the improvement was of a very questionable kind, involving at least as much loss as gain: now and then, as in the familiar instance of *Laodamia*, the change was unquestionably and inexpressibly for the worse. But in all the best representative poems of Wordsworth, whatever other quality may be wanting to them, there is, it appears to me, at least this invaluable one of seeming spontaneity. Neither on his verse nor on the verse of Keats, whom we now know to have been an equally painstaking labourer in the vineyard of versification, did the process of revision and correction, deletion and substitution, leave any evident marks of the passage of the pumice-stone. Grinders if they were, they had the skill to erase from the surface of their work all traces of the grinder's toil. There is no more sign of labour in the sensitive and subtle touch of the younger man than in the resolute and steadfast handiwork of the elder: a point perhaps even more remarkable in the genius of Keats than in the genius of Wordsworth. That exquisite and epicurean subtlety in expression of sensations impressed upon an exceptionally sensitive temper of mind and body, which was so specially characteristic of Keats

as a student of nature, might have been supposed impossible of attainment without some sacrifice of simplicity and straightforwardness : yet, if the secrets of his workshop had never been made public, we could no more have felt certain that his work had not been thrown off at a jet, like Shakespeare's and Hugo's, than we should have dreamed of looking for the traces of the file on Wordsworth's. And it must be owned that neither in the best of his good work nor in the worst of his bad should we have recognized the sign of this life-long habit on the elder poet's part. From the transcendent *Ode to Duty* down to the unspeakable ballad of *Andrew Jones*, the great or small changes made in the text of his poems would hardly in any case have been surmised by the finest ear or the keenest eye to be found among all students of style.

As a spiritual poet, and as the poet of nature, Wordsworth won at last, and wore for a generation, the palm of pre-eminence to which his patient and severe ambition had from the first made tacit or explicit claim. And yet, setting aside the poets of pure theology or formal religion, we may find elsewhere higher flights of strenuous contemplation, purer notes of spiritual passion, than in any but one or two quite exceptional poems of Wordsworth's. Even at his highest, he can hardly be said to have ever shown for so long together such an even strength of wing, such a sweeping and soaring harmony of upward and forward flight, as Donne, despite one or two slips and flaws, has displayed in the ardent and majestic rapture of his magnificent *Anniversaries*. Nor did his systematic and studious love of nature, even in those days of more passionate delight in it on which at

the age of twenty-eight he could already look back as belonging to a stage of life and feeling irrevocably past and ended, give ever such wings to his words or such fire to their music as any note or any touch of Shelley's is sufficient to show that he could command—that he could not but assume—if he had to deal but for a moment with the glories of nature or the emotions evoked by transitory or enduring sense of them. There is much study, there is much knowledge, there is much sober and sedate enjoyment of nature, much deep and thoughtful thankfulness for such enjoyment, made manifest in the poetry of Wordsworth: there is a singular intensity, a matchless refinement, of relish for the pure delight of communion with natural beauty, perceptible in the poetry of Keats: but to neither was it given, as it was given to Shelley, to rise beyond these regions of contemplation and sensation into that other where the emotion of Keats and the emotion of Wordsworth become one, and are superseded by a greater; to breathe, in Shakespeare's audaciously subtle and successful phrase, the very 'spirit of sense' itself, to transcend at once the sensuous and the meditative elements of poetry, and to fuse their highest, their keenest, their most inward and intimate effects, in such verse as utters what none before could utter, and renders into likeness of form and sound such truths of inspired perception, such raptures of divine surprise, as no poet of nature may think to render again. At the sound of the *Ode to the West Wind*, the stars of Wordsworth's heaven grow fainter in our eyes, and the nightingale of Keats's garden falls silent in our ears. The poet who wrote that, and the poet who wrote *Christabel*,

—but these alone of their generation—are indeed to be counted among the very chiefest glories of English poetry: and it is surely no inadequate reward for the noble labour of a long and strenuous life, to stand where Wordsworth stands—but a little lower than these.

CHARLES LAMB AND GEORGE WITHER.

THE most beloved of English writers may be Goldsmith or may be Scott: the best beloved will always be Charles Lamb. His claim and his charm, for those who can feel them at all, are incomparable with any other man's. The more we consider any possible points of comparison, any plausible shades of likeness, which may seem to suggest or to establish the fact of his spiritual kinship with greater or lesser humourists before him or after—with Sterne (for example) among his precursors, or with Hood among his successors, the more we are convinced, the more we are certified of the truth, that in all those qualities which most endear his memory to us all he holds really of no man but himself. It is impossible merely to like him: you must, as Wordsworth bade the redbreast whom he saw chasing the butterfly

Love him, or leave him alone.

All men worthy to know him would seem always to have loved him in proportion to their worthiness; and this inevitable affection would seem again to have given them for a time the very qualities most wanting to their usual habit of mind. It fixed the inconstancy of Coleridge: it softened the austerity of Wordsworth. It withdrew for a moment the author of *The Friend* from

contemplation of metaphysics, and the author of *The Prelude* from meditation on himself. Nor was the converse of this testimony wanting to the completeness of the evidence afforded, the perfection of the tribute paid him. To the currish man of parts, to the selfish man of genius, a man so upright and unselfish, so single-hearted and clear-spirited, must indeed have seemed pitiable and contemptible. The sycophant Moore and the backbiter Carlyle have added what it was in them to add to the memorial raised by Wordsworth: the witness of the toad and the homage of the scorpion to a creature that could not crawl and would not sting. This indeed was not wanted, but it is as well that it should not be wanting. Their distaste and their disdain may serve to enhance yet more the value, to justify yet further the expression, of Shelley's and of Landor's most reverent and most ardent sympathy. Between Lamb and these two greater poets there was as wide and deep a gulf of difference as could well exist between men of genius: the bond between them was that of community in goodness, of simple-hearted and pure-minded lovingkindness. So much is easily perceptible and readily definable by any one who runs and reads: but for those whom nature has sealed of the tribe of his lovers—for those who find in his work a sweetness like no other fragrance, a magic like no second spell, in all the world of letters—there is also something less explicable or expressible in the attraction which they feel towards the slightest relic of his hand. And of this it is difficult even to write without the appearance, if not without the danger, of an overflow into gushing ebullience or an outbreak of effusive sentiment. There is something in it of so inti-

mate a tenderness, a devotion so personal and private, an affection so familiar and so grateful, that the translation or the transference of such impressions into definite speech seems hardly more difficult as a task than indelicate as an attempt. The exquisite humour, the womanly tenderness, which inform and imbue each other with perfect life and faultless grace beyond reach of any art but that which itself is nature ; the matchless refinement of his criticism, the incomparable spontaneity of his style ; all these it is easy, if it is not impertinent, to praise : the something within or beyond all these which possibly may appeal but to few can assuredly be defined by none. A more acceptable service than any futile attempt at definition of the indefinable is rendered by any one who gives us but one grain or one drop more from the siftings of his granary or the runnings of his well : provided that these have in them the pure and genuine flavour of the special soil. A very few relics —two or three at most—have been preserved, and even foisted into certain recent editions, with which his truest lovers would be the readiest to dispense. But these are not among the spontaneous effusions of his natural mind : they are avowedly and obviously the forced products of unenjoying labour or of merriment for once uninspired. Cancel these, with a few imitative sentimentalities of his earliest versifying days, and there will remain of him nothing that may not be treasured and enjoyed for ever. But if there be one part of his work more delightful than another—more delightful (if that be possible) than the very *Essays of Elia*—it is to be found by readers who are fit to relish it in those fugitive notes and marginal observations which have all the

bright fine freedom of his most fanciful letters, and all the clear swift insight of his subtlest criticisms. For their behoof only who feel as I feel the charm of the slightest and lightest among such fragments of commentary and strays of annotation, I have undertaken to give a fuller account than has yet been given of Lamb's remarks on Wither and his editors or critics. To others the task will seem idle, the result of it a profitless collection of 'trivial fond records;' a gleaning after harvest, a skimming of skimmed milk. Those only will care to glance at it for whom alone it is intended: those only who would treasure the slightest and hastiest scratch of the writer's pen which carried with it the evidence of spontaneous enthusiasm or irritation, of unconsidered emotion or unprompted mirth.

There are now before me the two volumes of selections from the lyrical and satirical poems of George Wither, rather meanly printed, in small octavo proof-sheets, interleaved with quarto sheets of rough thin paper, which are made precious by the manuscript commentary of Lamb. The second fly-leaf of the first volume bears the inscription, 'Ja^{s} Pulham Esq^{r}. from Charles Lamb.' A proof impression of the well-known profile sketch of Lamb by Pulham has been inserted between this and the preceding fly-leaf. The same place is occupied in the second volume by the original pencil drawing, to which is attached an engraving of it 'Scratched on Copper by his Friend Brook Pulham;' and on the fly-leaf following is a second inscription—'James Pulham Esq. from his friend Cha^{s} Lamb.' On the reverse of the leaf inscribed with these names in the first volume begins the commentary afterwards republished, with

slight alterations and transpositions, as an essay 'on the poetical works of George Wither.' The opening sentence of this commentary is all but identical with the sixth paragraph of that essay in the latest and the best edition of Lamb's works; some slight modification being made necessary by the change which gave precedence to his remarks on Wither's satires over those on his lyrical poems. The original manuscript begins exactly thus:—

'Fair Virtue, or the Mistress of Philarete.

'There is singular beauty in the construction of this poem; it is in substance a Panegyric,' and so on, as in the published text, where however the first words of commendation do not reappear. Another sentence, originally interpolated after the first four lines given as a sample of the text, has been cancelled, it would seem, so as not to intercept the flow or impair the impression of the lyric verse.

> '"Nay, I muse her servants are not
> Pleading love; but O! they dare not.
> And I therefore wonder why
> They do not grow sick and die."

'His way of accounting for this is so ingenious, so philosophical on the principles of love, that I am tempted to transcribe it.' This however need not here be done again, as all readers will have read it in Lamb's essay, whither all worthy of such reading will gladly turn to look for it once more. The lovely six verses beginning, 'Stars indeed fair creatures be,' are carefully underlined in this manuscript. After the quotation from Drayton with which the printed essay concludes, the manuscript proceeds thus:—

'The whole poem, for the delicacy of the thoughts,

and height of the passion, is equal to the best of Spenser's, Daniel's or Drayton's love verses; with the advantage of comprising in a whole all the fine things which lie scatter'd in their works, in sonnets, and smaller addresses—The happy chearful spirit of the author goes with it all the way; that *sanguine temperament*, which gives to all Wither's lines (in his most loved metre especially, where chiefly he is a Poet) an elasticity, like a dancing measure; it [is] as full of joy, and confidence, and high and happy thoughts, as if it were his own Epithalamium which, like Spenser, he were singing, and not a piece of preambulary, probationary flattery.'

'Not in use,' remarks a commentator whom we here meet for the first time; bewildered by the antepenultimate word of the foregoing sentence. 'What is the meaning of this?' I doubt, however, for a reason which will soon be obvious, whether it was in deference to this piteous inquiry that Lamb thus altered the turn of his closing words—or condoned by subscription of his initials the alteration which perhaps may rather be due to Gutch:—'as if, like Spencer' (*sic*), 'he were singing his own Epithalamium, and not a strain of probationary courtship.' Under these last words the initials C. L. are scrawled in a large dancing hand. Between the first and second versions of this closing sentence is a cancelled note, apparently in Lamb's earlier handwriting, on the last line of these four:

> I am no Italian lover,
> That will mew thee in a jail;
> But thy beauty I discover,
> English-like, without a veil.

'It is,' says the annotator, 'a pleasing compliment which

several of our Elder Poets bestow upon their fair countrywomen, that, contrary to the custom of the more Southern nations of Europe, they possess such an innate modesty, that their beauty needs not a veil to increase it.' This pleasing observation is underlined throughout, but has afterwards been struck through and through with fierce and jagged strokes of a contemptuous pen ; while under it the later and unmistakable hand of Lamb has written in high upright characters the discourteous monosyllable 'stuff.' And certainly the original remark was rather too much in the epistolary style of Allan Clare and his sister.

The earlier pages of the reprint of *Fair Virtue* are interleaved with copious notes, explanatory or illustrative; extracts from Withering's *Botany* and parallel passages from well-known or unknown poets—Spenser, Sidney, Milton, Massinger, Browne, Markham, Cook, Joshua Silvester,[1] and Dr. Samuel Johnson: one or two

[1] The extract given from Silvester is so long and so carefully transcribed that it may be worth a word of notice. It is thus introduced : 'In Joshua Silvester's translation of "Du Bartas's divine Weekes" there is a poem intitled "An Ode of the Love and the Beauties of Astrea," the metre and sentiments of which Wither has so closely imitated that the quotation in this place cannot be inappropriate.' Thus the sentence ran at first, but a hand which is recognizable even in an all but erased pencil-scratch as that of the judicious Dr. Nott has written in the margin 'This is much too unqualified : ' whereon—or at least, as I presume, whereafter—a pen was struck through the last fourteen words, and the passage now stands thus :—'the metre and sentiments of which bear so close a resemblance' (to what we are not informed) 'and are altogether so elegant that I' (Gutch, not Lamb) 'shall be excused for the length of the quotation.' Seven stanzas and a half are then transcribed, in which there are some pretty fanciful lines, and others which limp and lag most pitifully. 'If more than my life I love thee'—'Thy hand, handle of perfection'—'Ah ! 't's a thing far more divine'—such verses as these might soothe an ear as

perhaps transcribed by Lamb; others, I presume, by his old schoolfellow John Matthew Gutch, the editor on whom for friendship's sake and Wither's he bestowed the treasures of his toil and thought. The first pencilled note from his hand is a correction of another from the hand of the worthy Dr. Nott. To that estimable person these first remarks of the most exquisite critic that ever lived had been, it would appear, submitted for his observation by the judicious diffidence or deference of Mr. Gutch: with a double result of the quaintest and most delightful kind. Dr. Nott, sciolist and pedant, delivers oracular judgment on the text of Wither and the commentary of Lamb in such a tone as 'Jimmy Boyer' might have used in passing sentence on a faulty exercise shown up by Lamb or by Gutch at Christ's Hospital. Lamb, on receiving again the proof-sheets annotated by himself and now further enriched by the sententious animadversions of an elegant and reverend critic, proceeds to comment on his commentator with fantastic rapture of alternate irony and indignation. The first of these notes upon notes are temperate and business-like: but, as Dr. Nott might have observed, 'vires acquirit eundo.' Wither, for instance, having spoken of 'sweet eyelids—*meanly* fringed with beaming hair,' evokes from the judicial Nott a reflection to the effect that 'this word should be explained. I think it signifies *interveniently*: intermediately: as *veiling* the lustre of the eyes.' To this ingenious suggestion Lamb is contented to reply—'Meanly is simply *in a mean* or *in moderation*.' The

ntolerant of 'dulcet rhymes' as Walt Whitman's own. The likeness of metre and sentiments does not go far beyond an occasional community of commonplace between the flowing verses of Wither and the halting verses of Silvester.

poet, having duly glorified the 'jewel-gracing ears' of his mistress, thus daintily winds up his praise of them :

> There the voice in love's meanders
> Those their pretty circlings wanders,
> Whose rare turnings will admit
> No rude speech to enter it.

Lamb has very justly marked this last couplet as 'delicate :' that the expression as constrained by the rhyme is more graceful than grammatical he has not thought it worth while to notice. When, after many passages no less deserving of praise for graceful and tender simplicity, Wither, with an unsavoury touch of the coarseness of his age, compliments his lady on using 'no loathsome fucus' for her complexion, 'mixed with Jewish fasting-spittles,' 'Explain this term,' demands Gutch : 'Leave it out,' suggests Lamb, with a broad and vehement stroke of his pencil. But a little further there are six lines so charming that I cannot but transcribe them, though undistinguished by any token of recognition or applause from Lamb.

> If you mark, when for her pleasure
> She vouchsafes to foot a measure,
> Though with others' skill she pace,
> There's a sweet, delightful grace
> In herself, which doth prefer
> Art beyond that art in her.

On page 70 Lamb has proposed a new reading which speaks for itself—'Jove's endeared Ganimed,' for the meaningless 'endured' of the text before him. Against a couplet now made famous by his enthusiastic citation of it—

> Thoughts too deep to be expressed
> And too strong to be suppressed—

he has written—'Two eminently beautiful lines.' Opposite the couplet in which Wither mentions the poets

> whose verse set forth
> Rosalind and Stella's worth

Gutch (as I suppose) has written the names of Lodge and Sidney; under which Lamb has pencilled the words 'Qu. Spenser and Sidney;' perhaps the more plausible conjecture, as the date of Lodge's popularity was out, or nearly so, before Wither began to write.

The first of many puns provoked by the poor pedant's name was not flung at the reverend head of Dr. Nott till some time after the first occasion given. Wither has described with a cordial complacency the perfections of such good young men as

> in midst of beauty's fires
> Walk unscorched of ill desires.
> Yet no such as stupid shame
> Keeps from actions worthy blame:

whereon Dr. Nott remarks that 'we should perhaps read *not*' [such]. 'The meaning is,' continues this irrefragable divine, 'these chaste lovers are not deterred from unruly passion by shamefacedness, or boyish sheepishness and ignorance; for they are men, and have the passions of men. They are not coy to the impression of female beauty, though they can restrain the vehemence of their inclination.' These remarks, at once neat and appropriate, have provoked from Lamb, I regret to say, the following suggestion by way of improvement on the style of Dr. Nott's truly negative commendation: 'no such sort of persons neither as &c. Why not, Nott?' Lamb's natural intolerance of all empty or superfluous

writing is attested—if any proof were wanting for the reader of his works—by the next little note from his hand. Wither, after a long and flowing panegyric on his lady's virtues, exclaims—

> These are beauties that shall last
> When the crimson blood shall waste
> And the shining hair wax grey
> Or with age be borne away.

'The beauty of this passage,' reflects the commentator, 'is too apparent to need a comment.' 'Then why give it one?' asks Lamb, very reasonably. But he has abstained from affixing so much as a mark of admiration to a modest query which seems to deserve a word in passing. 'If I wound or sickness had,' says Wither,

> None should for my curing run,
> No, not to Apollo's son.

'Qy. Esculapius?' suggests the cautious annotator, with the diffidence of genuine scholarship.

After the reprint of *Fair Virtue* comes the reprint of *The Shepherd's Hunting*, with Lamb's well-known remarks on that most graceful poem prefixed in a clear flowing hand, and subscribed at a later date with his initials. Near the opening of the fourth eclogue is the pencilled suggestion of a new reading—'mossy rocks' instead of 'massy.' A more important note is that on the couplet which affirms

> That the sacred Muses can
> Make a child in years, a man.

'Good motto for a life of Chatterton,' remarks Lamb; 'by a *Chattertonian*,' subjoins the too sarcastic Nott: who presumably regarded the marvellous boy with such

eyes as Gifford and Carlyle turned asquint on Keats and Shelley. The next verses are worth transcription on their own account no less than on account of Lamb's annotation.

> It is known what thou canst do,
> For it is not long ago
> When that Cuddy, thou, and I,
> Each the other's skill to try,
> At St. Dunstan's charmèd well,
> (As some present there can tell)
> Sang upon a sudden theme,
> Sitting by the crimson stream ;
> Where if thou didst well or no
> Yet remains the song to show.

To the fifth of these verses the following note is appended :—

'The Devil Tavern, Fleet Street, where Child's Place now stands, and where a sign hung in my memory within 18' (substituted for 16) 'years, of the Devil and St. Dunstan—Ben Jonson made this a famous place of resort for poets by drawing up a set of Leges Convivales which were engraven in marble on the chimney-piece in the room called Apollo. One of Drayton's poems is called The Sacrifice to Apollo ; it is addrest to the priests or Wits of Apollo, and is a kind of poetical paraphrase upon the Leges Convivales—This Tavern to the very last kept up a room with that name. C. L.' —who might have added point and freshness to this brief account by citing the splendid description of a revel held there under the jovial old Master's auspices, given by Careless to Aurelia in Shakerley Marmion's admirable comedy, *A Fine Companion.* But it is remarkable that Lamb—if I mistake not—has never quoted or mentioned that brilliant young dramatist and poet

who divided with Randolph the best part of Jonson's mantle.

No student of his critical writings will have forgotten Lamb's comment on Wither's couplet,

> If thy verse doth bravely tower,
> As she makes wing, she gets power;

many will presumably be glad to see it as first jotted down opposite the printed text.

'A *long* line is a Line *we are long repeating*. Mark the time, which it takes to repeat these properly. What slow movement'—or, as first written, 'what Majesty'—'could Alexandrines express more than this?' (originally, 'more than these? What a power of overcoming difficulties is expressed in this,')

'"*As she makes wing, she gets power;*"

One makes a foot of every syllable. C. L.'

On the right-hand margin of the line thus immetrically printed in the text—

> Or the least bough's rust'ling—

Lamb has pencilled—'better spell it rusteling as in Edit. 1620.'

In that rapturous melody of praise and thanksgiving to Poetry which has made the modest name and gentle genius of Wither immortal in the loving memory of all who know and cherish that 'best earthly bliss' which filled his prison-house with 'comfort and delight,' there occurs one verbal point of dispute on which Lamb pronounces with more decision than perhaps is wholly warrantable.

> Though our wise ones call thee madness,
> Let me never taste of gladness
> If I love not thy madd'st fits
> More than all their greatest wits.

The word 'gladness' is struck through, and 'sadness' substituted in the margin. Opposite is a note, afterwards cancelled, which runs thus: 'Edit. 1620, Sadness. In the meaning of sobriety or saneness of mind opposed to madness—Better perhaps than gladness.' A pen has been struck across this, and the following note substituted: '*Sadness* (i.e. Sobriety or Sanity), oppos'd to *madness*;—*gladness* is quite unantithetical, and meaningless. C. L.' May I venture to say that this view seems to me less plausible than ingenious? Sadness is of course often used, in the English of Wither's age, as simply equivalent to gravity; but such an imprecation as is conveyed by this reading has surely too singular a sound, gives too forced and grotesque a turn to the expression, for any poet to have rejected in its favour the natural and obvious word which rhyme and reason would alike have suggested, even had it never found its way into any previous edition of the text.

At the close of Wither's high-spirited and manly postscript to the poem on which, as he tells us, his publisher had bestowed the name of *The Shepherd's Hunting*, a passage occurs which has provoked one of the most characteristic outbreaks of wrath and mirth to be found among all Lamb's notes on Nott's notes on Lamb's notes on the text of Wither. 'Neither am I so *cynical* but that I think a modest expression of such amorous conceits as suit with reason, will yet very well become my years; in which not to have feeling of the power of *love*, were as great an argument of much stupidity, as an over-sottish affection were of extreme folly.' In illustration of this simple and dignified sen-

tence Lamb cites the following most apt and admirable parallel.

'"Nor blame it, readers, in those years to propose to themselves such a reward, as the noblest dispositions above other things in this life have sometimes preferred; whereof not to be sensible, when good and fair in one person meet, argues both a gross and shallow judgment, and withall an ungentle and swainish breast."—*Milton*—Apology for Smectymn[u]us.'

'Why is this quoted?' demands the too inquisitive Nott; 'I see little similarity.' 'It was quoted for those who *can* see,' rejoins Lamb, with three thick strokes of his contemptuous pencil under the luckless Doctor's poor personal pronoun; on which this special note of indignation is added beneath.

'I. I. I. I. I. in Capitals!—
for shame, write *your* Ego thus
little i with a dot
stupid Nott!'

Thus bad begins, but worse remains behind for the Doctor. The next and last poem in the volume is 'An Elegiacal Epistle of Fidelia to her unconstant friend.' Towards the close of it the supposed writer expresses a hope that her doubts of her lover's fidelity may after all be groundless, and all the apparent proofs of his falsehood 'but treacherous plots of some base foes.'

'Which if it prove, as yet methinks it may,
O what a burden shall I cast away,—
What cares shall I lay by—and to what height
Tower, in my new ascension to delight![1]

[1] Lamb has passed by these magnificent lines without a word. I must be allowed a note of my own, to observe that there is hardly in all the range of English heroic verse an effect so noble, so majestic a touch of

> Sure, ere the full of it I come to try,
> I shall e'en surfeit in my joy, and die.
> But such a loss might well be call'd a thriving,
> Since more is got by dying so, than living.
> 'Come, kill me then, my dear! if thou think fit,
> With that which never killèd woman yet.'

This line, according to Lamb (or possibly according to Gutch), 'alludes to "The [A] Woman Killed with Kindness;"' 'not necessarily,' thinks Nott: 'ass,' retorts Lamb in his largest (pencil) writing. But at the close of the poem a graver offence on the Doctor's part has provoked a fiercer explosion than any we have yet witnessed.

'People *will not*,' if Nott is not mistaken, 'read this heavy and rambling epistle. I should think fifty lines would comprize (*sic*) its merits. To much of Philarete the same remark (!) applies: and I suspect that the public will dissent from you in their opinion of the occasional interruptions of the singing-boy.'

'Damn the Public and you too, thou Bellua nullius capitis!'

With this gentle expression of responsive dissent Lamb concludes his notes on the first of these two volumes. At the opening of the second we find the notes on *Abuses stript and whipt* which in their revised condition as part of the essay on Wither are familiar to all lovers of English letters. They begin with the second paragraph of that essay, in which sundry slight and delicate touches of improvement have fortified or simplified the original form of expression. After the

metre as here; not even in the poem where if anywhere we might have expected to find it—in Shelley's *Epipsychidion*.

sentence which describes the vehemence of Wither's love for goodness and hatred of baseness, the manuscript proceeds thus: 'His moral feeling is work'd up into a sort of passion, something as Milton [1] describes himself at a like early age, that night and day he laboured to attain to a certain idea which he had of perfection.' Another cancelled passage is one which originally followed on the reflection that 'perhaps his premature defiance often exposed him' (altered in the published essay to 'sometimes made him obnoxious') 'to censures, which he would otherwise have slipped by.' The manuscript continues: 'But in this he is as faulty as some of the primitive Christians are described to have been, who were ever ready to outrun the executioner.'

The treatment of the next sentence by Nott (if Nott and not Gutch it be whose impudent fingers have defaced it) seems to me worth a moment's notice.

'The homely versification of these Satires is not likely to please in this age.' So wrote Lamb, simply and justly. Thus writes the corrector: 'The homely versification of these Satires, as Poems, the Editor does not print as likely to please readers of refinement.' The quality of this alteration is too apparent to need a comment. Then why give it one?

The first noteworthy note from the hand of Lamb on

[1] Altered by the elegant hand of the revisor into this more acceptable form—'similar to that which Milton describes himself as feeling' &c. Let this stand as a sample of the fashion in which Lamb's exquisite English was improved by the awkward impertinence of editorial scribblers who would have strained out all the sweetness and drained out all the sap of it. There are five or six other such instances on this single page of manuscript.

the text of Wither's satires is pencilled opposite a line in the first of them, headed 'Of the Passion of Love.'

> 'But how now; was't not you (says one) that late
> So humbly begg'd a boon at beauty's gate?'

This second verse is underlined by Lamb, and marked as a 'beautiful line;' and in the margin of the following four verses (two pages later) he has again written 'beautiful.'

> Yet, for all this, look, where I loved of late,
> I have not turn'd it in a spleen to hate;
> No, for 'twas first her virtue and her wit
> Taught me to see how much I wanted it.

On a passage in the interesting and high-toned fifth satire, 'Of Revenge,' there is a note by Lamb which has provoked as amusing a controversy as any that enlivens the margins of this volume. Wither, it must be understood, has been dwelling with no unmanly self-complacency on the self-control displayed in the forbearance of his conduct towards a cowardly tale-bearer who had spread against him some foul calumny, 'a damned invention,' which, as Lamb has remarked, 'seems to be the slander referred to in his verses to his Mother' reprinted towards the end of this volume; a slander circulated, as he hardly need have told us, 'with dissemblings fair, and shews of love and grief,' after the changeless fashion of such venomous vermin.

> I must confess I let his error pass,
> Nor have I done amiss; for say, an ass
> Had struck me with his heels: how should I quit
> The harm he doth me? You would blame my wit
> If I should kill him. If I went to law,
> Who would not hold me the most ass—a daw—

Or worst of fools? And pray, what were I less,
If I had done't to his unworthiness?
One that's so ignorant of his offence,
He seems as if he had no spark nor sense
Of understanding; one, whom if I touch
Or offer to lay hands on, 'tis as much
As if I in my anger would begin
To break the stool that erst had broke my shin.

Poets, as we all know, by all the evidence of all successive contemporaries, have steadily degenerated through each generation since the age of Wither—and indeed since the age of Chaucer: it is consoling, if it be requisite, to be reassured by such evidence as this that the breed of their backbiters, if it could not change for the better, has found it impossible to change, in any respect whatever, for the worse. Examples of the type above described have this in common with the poor—we have them always with us. It might suffice, one would think, to connote any particular specimen as belonging to the tribe of autocoprophagi: but Lamb, eager to denote this individual example of its kind, has referred the reader of the following remark to the words 'a daw' in the sixth line of this extract—doubly underlined by his energetic pencil.

'I take the name of this man to have been Daw'—the name again doubly underlined. To whom the sceptic, or in the phrase of Wither's time the nullifidian Nott:—'I should doubt this—he would not compare himself to the other (!)—Daw was wanted for the rhyme.' To whom again Lamb:—'I'll be damn'd if Daw was not his name. C. L.' And below:—'Explain this line' on the opposite page ('Bearing his folly's emblem in

his name,') 'in any other possible way. Not compare himself with the other! why, 'tis the commonest way of speaking, IF I did so and so, I were a greater fool than he I arraign of folly. But I waste words on this Daw of Daws.' This example rather of the countercheck quarrelsome than of the retort courteous is vehemently pencilled along the margin of a previous note on the fashion of fighting duels on Calais sand. 'In the Comedy of Albumazar,' as he says, 'Trincalo is pleasant on this subject;' but the passage has now grown stale through frequent quotation. 'This custom,' he adds, 'is mentioned in Sam[l] Rowland's [Rowlands'] *Good Newes and Bad Newes*, 1622:' whence he proceeds to transcribe four lines.

At the close of the seventh satire, 'Of Jealousy,' Nott, who has been very severe on the satire preceding it, observes:—'There is but little pungency in this either.' To him Lamb, in punning indignation:—'Pray, expunge your observations, or make *them* a little more pungent.'

In the ninth satire, 'Of Ambition,' Wither, after a sharp attack on 'the Beast of Rome, and his foul brood of climbing cardinals,' prays Heaven

> There rise not up another monster here
> 'Mongst our ambitious churchmen;

but proceeds with great earnestness to disclaim any community of opinion with those

> That do our reverend bishops disallow,

and grows warm in praise of Abbot, archbishop of Canterbury, late bishop of London, condoling with the metropolis on the loss of 'this rare one among men,'

and again congratulating it on the fact that Abbot's late see was filled by King ; in other words,

> that fate did bring
> In place of such a father, such a king—
> . . . . .
> Yet is my Muse so constant in her frown,
> She shall not soothe a king for half his crown.

In each of these verses Lamb has underlined the word 'king,' and asks, with a strange slip of the pen,—it can hardly have been a slip of memory—'Was King bishop of London, after Laud?' This not immoderate satire on clerical ambition seems to have ruffled the spiritual plumage of Dr. Nott, who brands it as a 'very dull essay indeed.' To whom, in place of exculpation or apology, Lamb returns this question by way of answer :—'Why double-dull it with thy dull commentary? have you nothing to cry out but "very dull," "a little better," "this has some spirit," "this is prosaic," foh!

'If the sun of Wither withdraw a while, Clamour not for joy, Owl, it will out again, and blear thy envious Eyes!'

The tenth satire, 'Of Fear,' though not very brilliant or forcible in style or verse, is curious and amusing, with a touch of historic interest towards the close, where Wither attacks the improvidence which leaves the country unprepared and her citizens undrilled for resistance, while on the strength of a muster taken once in four years

> we suppose
> There are no nations dare to be our foes.

Ignorant, perhaps, or forgetful, of the value given to this impeachment of his countrymen's characteristic and

hereditary infirmity by the circumstances of the writer's future career as a soldier in the cause of the Commonwealth, 'Who,' asks the supercilious Nott, 'would read this satire twice?' 'I,' replies Lamb, with an emphatic stroke of his pencil. 'Why not, Nott?'

Near the end of the fourteenth satire, 'Of Cruelty,' opposite an undeniably flat and feeble verse, which had the authors known it might have been embalmed in the treatise of Scriblerus on the Bathos, the facetious Doctor has vented a marginal ejaculation of 'Dear me!' Lamb underlines the second word, and asks, 'Is anything else dear to you?'

In the first satire of the second series, 'Of Vanity,' Wither denounces the abuses which had crept into the administration of the universities, where 'heretofore, in better days,' store of palaces had been erected by the patrons of good learning, that there the Muses might live in sheltered safety,

> and not beholding be
> To Pyren[1] for his hospitality.

'Who is he?' inquires Nott, in sardonic perplexity. The answer is: 'Wither has here made a masculine of Pirene, the Muse's (*sic*) fountain. C. L.' But if this be the meaning, surely the word 'his' is a simple and obvious misprint for 'her.' Wither tells us that he was 'well grounded' at school, 'and no whit for grammar-rules to seek;' and such a barbarism would have been well-

[1] Can this word possibly be a misprint for the name of Hiero, the royal patron of poets who had left their country for his court? This suggestion may seem far-fetched, but only to those who have no personal experience of printers, and their insane ingenuities of verbal or literal perversion.

nigh impossible even to such 'huge fat curmudgeons' as are not, says the satirist soon after,

> half so fit, if't came to proof,
> To serve for pastors, as to hang at roof

—'to smoke like Bacon,' explains the author of the Essay on Roast Pig.

'If,' says Wither, after denouncing the dunces who abuse the gifts and foundations of 'well-devoted patrons,'

> If I could take on me some hideous form,
> I'd either make them their bad lives reform,
> Or fear them quick to hell.

'Qu. bear?' suggests Nott. 'Fear, i.e. fright,' answers Lamb: whose reading is no doubt much the finer, if perhaps at first sight the less plausible.

From consideration of other forms of the vice or folly attacked in this long and somewhat desultory satire, Wither passes on to rebuke the monumental vanity of epitaphs, of a glorious funeral or a flattering sermon, carved marble or a gilded tomb. The erection of Stonehenge supplies him with an apt if not a fresh illustration of his general text: 'if a deed of such great wonder die,' how shall 'a few carved stones' secure to a man's name the immortality which its unknown founders thought surely to secure in vain?

'This is taken,' writes Lamb, 'from some far superior lines in Daniel's Musophilus; as it is a most noble passage, and not generally known, it may perhaps be worth while to quote it at length:' as he proceeds to do, giving a full reference to its exact place in the edition of 1718 before he transcribes fifty-four verses in a delicately

clear and even hand. The extract is a model of dignified melody, and the high simplicity of a meditative and stately style: but Dr. Nott 'cannot think the passage deserves so high an eulogium.' 'You damn'd fool!' rejoins the transcriber, in a less dainty but more vigorous autograph.

The author of the *Farewell to Tobacco* has very happily corrected a misprint in the closing couplet of a passage which attacks the misuse of the 'great plant' by 'rascal ragamuffins' with an energy that might have won favour for the satirist from the judgment of King James.

> And you must yield, that now we justly *sumus*,
> E'en as the old verse says, *flos*, *fœnum*, *fumus*.

The word 'may' is printed in the text instead of the word 'sumus:' but, as Lamb has remarked, 'no doubt we should read, instead of may, *sumus*, to rhime with fumus.' 'Certainly,' assents the corroborative Nott.

'I'll not give a cue so soon,' says Wither, 'to see an ape—play his forc'd tricks, as I would give a tester' to see the apish tricks of vain gallants in their drunken or amorous frolics. 'Qu. cue. What?' asks Nott: and Lamb replies, 'Portecue; small coin of Portugal.'

In the following satire, 'Of Inconstancy,' Wither arraigns 'the vulgar' on the charge of envy as well as fickleness, and preference of rashness to mildness.

> He that doth trust unto their love shall find
> 'Tis more inconstant than the wavering wind;
> Which since my time a man, that many knew,
> Relying on it, at his death found true.

'Essex?' suggests Lamb; whose chronology seems here again somewhat at fault. In a passage of this satire

which I do not remember to have seen quoted by any commentator on Shakespeare, we come upon a rare Shakespearean word. 'An old chuff,' whose speech has some salt in it of homely dramatic humour, is represented as ridiculing the studious habits of the author's youth, and thanking God that his son is 'not zuch an asse,' but was always 'glad to keep the swine' rather than go to school;

> and what tricks the mome
> Would have invented then to stay at home,
> You would have wondered.

In a note on the fourth satire, 'Of Presumption,' Lamb has again shown his skill in conjectural emendation: suggesting 'lection or lesson' as the right reading, where the context affords no meaning to the phrase, 'God's sacred legion.' It is here that the poet avows himself a moderate Puritan and a textualist of the old Protestant school: he divides the offenders of his day into four classes, those that seek after new inventions in worship, those that over boldly take upon them to alter the text of scripture by addition and excision, those that will force others to allow of their own groundless opinions, and those that pry into secrets which God meant should be hidden—if his omnipotence could have managed it; students in astrology, for instance, though they, as the candid satirist allows, can make a fair apology; fortune-tellers by palmistry, who are indeed presumptuous, though less than those who would fix the date of the day of judgment; or those that ask, or venture even to relate, what God was doing before he created heaven and earth; where he was living in that rather dim stage of his existence; and—certainly a somewhat knotty

question—'how and by whom he then was glorified.' But, as Wither not irrationally observes, those that wind into such deep secrets find slender profit of their labour; for, 'to make known how highly they offend,' a merciful Providence often drives them raving mad. Some, again, hope to win God's favour by honesty, almsdeeds, and works of charity; but it is superfluous to add that their outlook is of the darkest. Theirs, however, is no better, who trust in faith without works; 'a religion that wants honesty' will please as little as 'honest shews without religion too.' How then, if these comfortable certainties be true, will those presumptuous fellows speed, who think to please their mighty God with such vain things as Christmas wassail-bowls, Hocktide custom, 'a Whit-sun-ale, or some such goodly motion?' Certainly, as Lamb observes in the margin, 'the Puritan pokes out his tender horns here.'

There is better stuff of a more secular kind in the latter part of this long rambling poem. Although professing his respect for some so-called Puritans, Wither expresses a contempt for

> the busy-headed sect,
> The hollow crew, the counterfeit elect,

as keen as his abhorrence of popery and simony: and having at length got clear (for the time) of theology, reverts to his complaint of the presumption shown in neglect of national defences;

> it appears,
> Through the great blessing of these quiet years,
> We are so fearless, careless, and secure
> In this our happy peace, and so cock-sure,
> As if we did suppose, or heard it said,
> Old Mars were strangled, or the devil dead.

Lamb has set a pencil-mark against this passage; and not long after his pencil has made a happy correction by substituting 'through' for 'thought,' as it stands misprinted in the text of the following couplet.

> For, if wars ever make this land complain,
> It will be through some truce we had with Spain.

The satirist then proceeds to enlarge in homely and earnest fashion on sundry crying abuses in army and navy; forts unrepaired and fraudulent captains, who pocket their men's wages, 'and one poor soldier serves alone for ten' (a trick noted more than once or twice by the dramatists of the day); the lack of hands in 'the navy royal,' and the roguery of the pursers who study only how to make their own profit by them: then, after warning of danger from the south, with a sudden and striking change of tone, he rises into the following note of patriotic and manful confidence, not unworthy a future fellow-soldier of Cromwell and of Blake:—

> But fear not, little isle: thy cause is right,
> And if thou hast not cast thy care off quite,
> Nor art secure, why, by that token then
> Thou shalt drive back that threatening storm again,
> Through God's assistance; even to ruin those
> By and amongst whom first of all it rose.

After this he slips back into theology, and laments the presumption which leaves our better parts open 'for the advantage of the greater foe than Rome or Spain.' A vehement attempt at a realistic description of hell, with 'garish forms' of devils, and 'ugly bugs' (bugbears), provokes from the sarcastic Nott a cry of '*bugs!* enough to make a man quake. This is but a

bug-bear sort of hell: a tale for the nursery.' Whereat Lamb, moved now beyond all patience, informs him that 'bugs (fool) do not here mean fleas' relations:' adding, in a colossal scrawl across a sheet and a half, by way of comment on upwards of three pages following, 'all this is great Poetry, tho' thou knowest it Nott!' And indeed the whole passage thus marked has real energy and reality of imagination and feeling, as well as a pure and forcible simplicity of style.

The *Epilogus* following this satire, and the poem of 'The Scourge' which succeeds it, have not been honoured by Lamb with any original notes: but the commentary on 'Wither's Motto' will be remembered by all students of the most exquisite critical essays in any language. They will not be surprised to learn that neither the style nor the matter of it found any favour in the judicial eye of Nott. 'There is some tautology in this, and some of the sentences are harsh—These repetitions are very awkward; but the whole sentence is obscure and far-fetched in sentiment;' such is the fashion in which this unlucky particle of a pedant has bescribbled the margin of Lamb's beautiful manuscript. But those for whom alone I write will share my pleasure in reading the original paragraph as it came fresh from the spontaneous hand of the writer, not as yet adapted or accommodated by any process of revision to the eye of the general reader.

'Wither's Motto.

'The poem which Wither calls his *Motto* is a continued self-eulogy' (originally written 'self-eulogium') 'of two thousand lines: yet one reads it to the end without

feeling any distaste, or being hardly conscious of having listen'd so long to a man praising himself. There are none of the cold particles of vanity in it ; no hardness or self-ends' (altered to 'no want of feeling, no selfishness;' but restored in the published text), 'which are the qualities that make Egotism hateful—The writer's mind was continually glowing with images of virtue, and a noble scorn of vice : what it felt, it honestly believed it possessed, and as honestly avowed it ; yet so little is this consciousness mixed up with any alloy of selfishness, that the writer seems to be praising qualities in another person rather than in himself ; or, to speak more properly, we feel that it was indifferent to him, where he found the virtues ; but that being best acquainted with himself, he chose to celebrate himself as their best known receptacle. We feel that he would give to goodness its praise, wherever found ; that it is not a quality which he loves for his own low self which possesses it ; but himself that he respects for the qualities which he imagines he finds in himself. With these feelings, and without them it is impossible to read it, it is as beautiful a piece of *self*-confession as the *Religio Medici* of Browne.

'It will lose nothing also if we contrast it' (or, as previously written, 'It may be worth while also to contrast it') 'with the Confessions of Rousseau.' ('How is Rousseau analogous?' queries the interrogatory Nott: on whom Lamb retorts—'analogous?!! why, this note was written to show the *difference* not the *analogy* between them. C. L.') 'In every page of the latter we are disgusted with the vanity, which brings forth faults, and begs us to take them (or at least the acknowledge-

ment of them) for virtue—But in Wither we listen to a downright confession of unambiguous virtues; and love the heart which has the confidence to pour itself out.' Here, at a later period, Lamb has written—'C. L. thus far.' On the phrase 'confession of unambiguous virtues' Dr. Nott has obliged us with the remark—'this seems an odd association:' and has received this answer:—'It was *meant* to be an odd one, to puzzle a certain sort of people. C. L.'—whose words should be borne in mind by every reader of his essays or letters who may chance to take exception to some passing turn of speech intended, or at least not wholly undesigned, to give occasion for that same 'certain sort of people' to stumble or to trip.

The succeeding paragraph of manuscript, as Lamb apparently thought it worth transcription, must indisputably be worth preservation. 'Taylor, the Water Poet, in contrast to this, came out with his Motto—"Et habeo, et careo, et curo; I have, I want, I care"—in 1621.

> "This Motto in my head at first I took,
> In imitation of a better book;
> And to good minds I no offence can give
> To follow good examples whilst I live."

'This is complimentary to his opponent, and so are other passages: nor does much personality appear in the production. Wood therefore had no strong authority for pitting them, as he did, against each other—In 1625 was printed at Oxford "An Answer to Wither's Motto, without a frontispiece: wherein *Nec habeo, nec careo, nec curo* are neither approved nor confuted, but modestly controuled or qualified." T. G. Esq., the author,

addresses himself to Wither, and says—"If the worst come, we shall do no worse than lawyers, who fall out with one another at the Bar, and are friends when they meet at the Temple Hall at dinner." The purport of this tract is to point out some contradictory passages in Wither's Motto: but the writer seems afraid of his antagonist, and his performance is the product (*sic*) of insipidity. Shipman, in his *Carolina* (1682), reviled Wither as a rhyming Presbyterian and trumpeter to rebellion in his *Nec habeo, nec careo, nec curo*.'

And certainly Wither has approved himself in this poem a Commonwealth's man of so thoroughly republican a spirit as thoroughly to deserve the scorn of all sycophants and the reprobation of all royalists. This is as much as to say that he no less deserves the honour done him by Lamb in the citation of a famous passage from the prose of Milton to illustrate his less exalted verse: for indeed this poem is at least 'a work not to be raised from the heat of youth, or the vapours of wine: like that which flows at waste from the pen of some vulgar amorist, or the trencher fury of some rhyming parasite'—such as Wither in homelier and humbler style has branded with no less righteous if with far less eloquent contempt.

> I cannot, for my life, my pen compel
> Upon the praise of any man to dwell,
> Unless I know, or think at least, his worth
> To be the same which I had blazèd forth.

('This declaration of his integrity as a poet,' observes Lamb, 'is not less honourable to himself than spiritedly sarcastic on many hireling rhymers.'—'This is very true,'

rejoins Nott, *naso adunco*, as if with the satirical smirk of a petulant pedagogue, 'but something in the style of Capel Lofft.' Whereon Lamb, whom wrath has here impelled to the perpetration—in one breath—of probably the two most abominable puns extant:—'In whose style are thy remarks, in the name of modesty? what bit of discovery hast thou made, to entitle thee to sit judge upon Common Place? Why, Capel Lofft may *keep aloft* from such as thee.')

> Had I some honest suit, the gain of which
> Would make me noble, eminent and rich,
> And that to compass it no means there were,
> Unless I basely flattered some great peer,
> Would with that suit my ruin I might get,
> If on those terms I would endeavour it!

'I'll be damn'd if you would! C. L.'—whose oath, let us believe, the recording angel did not obliterate—like Uncle Toby's—with a tear, but inscribed to his credit in characters of living light.

> I cannot give a plaudit, I protest,
> When, as his lordship thinks, he breaks a jest,
> Unless it moves me; neither can I grin,
> When he a causeless laughter doth begin.
> I cannot swear him truly honourable,
> Because he once receiv'd me to his table,
> And talk'd as if the Muses glad might be
> That he vouchsafèd such a grace to me.

'True old Holcroft!' exclaims Lamb in the margin of the passage just transcribed. He has marked as for approval three or four others in the course of the next few pages—not improbably, I think, with some further

personal references occasionally in his mind; as for instance where Wither alleges his unaltered cordiality of friendship for all who ever once had his affection, and in the same breath asserts his indifference as to whether they believe this or not until occasion be given him to show his love to some purpose.

> Nor have I ever said I lovèd yet,
> Where I expected more than love for it.

Opposite a passage in which he professes that under no circumstances would he wish to be another man than himself, Lamb cites for comparison a fine passage from Jeremy Taylor, which expresses and explains the same sentiment. A more singular parallel is discovered between a passage in which Wither declares his freedom from all physical antipathies to animals or national prejudices against foreigners and one in which Sir Thomas Browne makes the same profession for himself. To the extract given from the *Religio Medici* Lamb subjoins this note.

'It is not assuming too much to suppose that Sir T. B. might have been reading Wither just before he wrote this.'

A quaint passage in the text has provoked a quaint altercation in the notes, when the poet declares of himself—

> I have not so much beauty, to attract
> The eyes of ladies; neither have I lackt
> Of that proportion which doth well suffice
> To make me gracious in good people's eyes.

Whereon Lamb remarks:—'His portrait now re-engraved shews him to have been in person of no mean

attraction.' Dr. Nott would prefer to say, 'not deficient in personal comeliness.' 'Stupid alteration,' remarks the original annotator—not without reason. Soon after, on a phrase used by Wither in asserting his physical health and purity, Nott remarks 'how very fond he is of this phrase:' and Lamb replies:—'Not so fond as you to catch him tripping. He speaks passionately, you deride coldly. You sin, he never.' Self-complacency may be something less weighty than a sin, but even Lamb seems to feel that his favourite client had somewhat more of the quality than would usually be thought graceful, when he thus comments on Wither's estimate of his own pretentions as a suitor for the hand of any 'supposed mistress:'

'The whole of these two or three pages is in the spirit of Othello—who seems to have been as chary of throwing himself away as this Gentleman.

> "But that I love the gentle Desdemona,
> I would not my unhoused free condition
> Put into circumscription and confine
> For the sea's worth."

'But Wither is longer in saying it.'

'I do not think this worth quoting,' decides the judicial Nott. To him Lamb:—'Don't you? Who the devil are you? What are you, and what are you NOT? C. L.'

On that part of the poem which deals with the second clause of the motto Lamb has made no remark: but when Wither comes to the third head of his discourse (on the text 'Nec Curo') we also come upon a well-known passage of the commentary, which I transcribe as it stands in the manuscript.

'This clause of Wither's Motto is certainly the happiest ever chosen. The whole secret of Wither's happiness seems to have consisted in the act[1] of an innocent self-pleasing. His poems are so many professions of a generous Egotism—Whatever he does, it is to please himself; if he writes it is to please himself; he would have you think he never casts a care upon his readers—This way of talking requires a known warmth of heart in the person who uses it to make it palatable. Wither's kind heart gives a vital heat to all his professions of self-seeking.' ('Very obscure,' interposes the irrepressible Nott; 'to you, to others Not,' very justly retorts the writer.) 'By self he means a great deal, his friends, his principles, his country: sometimes he means all these by himself.[2] C. L.' Under this admirable note Dr. Nott has had the pedantic impertinence to scribble the pencilled remark—'This should be rewritten, with more simplicity:' to which Lamb responds, 'it should NOT, Nott!' the last word in pencil, but the subscription 'C. L.' in ink.

There are no further notes on this poem: but two truly noble passages are marked with a double cross and vehement pencil-strokes of admiration: the first, on the vanity of astrology, bears so vivid a resemblance to the famous verses of Fletcher 'On an Honest Man's Fortune' that we cannot but imagine some half unrecognized echo of their simple and stately cadence to have been

[1] The corresponding passage in the text of the published essay gives the reading 'act;' and so it seems to stand in the manuscript, though it might easily be read as 'art.'

[2] These seven words have been struck through and the following eleven substituted in a different hand—'all of which he sometimes includes in the description of himself.'

playing in the author's ear as he conceived the following lines.

> I'll seek within me, and if there I find
> Those stars which should give light unto my mind
> Rise fair and timely in me, and affect
> Each other with a natural aspect ;
> If in conjunction there perceive I may
> True virtue and religion every day,
> And walk according to that influence
> Which is derivèd unto me from thence,
> I fear no fortunes, whatsoe'er they be,
> Nor care I what my stars do threaten me.
> For he who to that state can once attain
> Above the power of all the stars doth reign.

There is a fine burst of mingled superstition and self-devotion on the next page, where, under the impression of a fancy that America may be 'the wilderness to which the "woman" and her "son" must fly to 'scape the "dragon's" fury' (as prognosticated in the lucid and significant pages of the Apocalypse), till God has been graciously pleased to reduce Europe into a state of 'barbarism' and bring in 'other people' to be his church, the poet exclaims,

> Why should his pleasure be my care or grief?
> O let his Name and Church more glorious grow,
> Although my ruin help to make it so !
> So I my duty in my place have done,
> I care not greatly what succeeds thereon ;
> For sure I am, if I can pleasèd be
> With what God wills, all shall be well for me.

This passage is not honoured by any notice from Lamb: the last in this poem which he has marked is that in which the author vows 'by the eternal Deity,'

Of whose great spirit these the sparklings are,
. . . . . .
So may I still retain that inward peace,
That love and taste of the eternal bliss,
Those matchless comforts, and those brave desires,
Those sweet contentments and immortal fires,
Which at this instant do inflame my breast,
And are too excellent to be exprest:
I do not care a rush, though I were born
Unto the greatest poverty and scorn
That, since God first infus'd it with his breath,
Poor flesh and blood did ever groan beneath;

verses not unworthy to kindle so noble an enthusiasm of sympathy in so noble a spirit as Charles Lamb's. As much may be said for these among not a few others:—

O that my lines were able to express
The cause and ground of this my carelessness;
That I might show you what brave things they be,
Which at this instant are a fire in me!

At the close of Wither's high-toned and pathetic address or epigram (so-called) to his father, Nott delivers himself of this remark:—'His quatrain stanzas are much smoother than his couplets.' To which Lamb appends this final note.

'Is that all you have to say on this divine Epigram and the following?[1] O Eloquent in abuse! Niggard where thou shouldst Praise! Most *negative Nott!*'

With which three parting kicks the thrice unhappy doctor is dismissed for ever and a day to the limbo of pedants.

[1] 'To his Mother'—with reference to the calumnious reports mentioned in the fifth satire of the first book.

'Jamque opus exegi,' which I would not have undertaken for love of any other man than Lamb: so much heavier to some hands than to others is the labour of transcription and collation. To those who feel nothing of the attraction which his lovers find in the lightest word, the slightest record, the smallest relic of Charles Lamb, the time and care spent on these fugitive notes will seem deplorably and strangely wasted. As many talk of Robin Hood who never shot in his bow, so do many talk of Charles Lamb who have never entered in spirit into the homely and happy sanctuary of his more private or inward presence. But for all who love him the charm of that companionship is alike indefinable and incomparable. It pervades his work as with an odour of sweet old-world flowers or spices long laid by among fine linens and rare brocades in some such old oaken or cedarn cabinet as his grandmother might have opened to rejoice the wondering senses of her boyish visitor at 'Blakesmoor.' His own words may best express the special feeling of tenderness and delight, familiar reverence and satisfied affection, which the very sound or thought of his 'gentle name' wakes up always anew within us into warmth and freshness of life. 'The names of some of our poets,' avows Elia in one of his last essays, with a graceful touch of apology for the fanciful confession, 'sound sweeter, and have a finer relish to the ear—to mine, at least—than that of Milton or of Shakespeare. It may be, that the latter are more staled and rung upon in common discourse. The sweetest names, and which carry a perfume in the mention, are, Kit Marlowe, Drayton, Drummond of Hawthornden, and Cowley.' And even so do we now find a homely

magic in the name of Lamb, a special fragrance in the fame of it, such as hardly seems to hang about the statelier sound of Coleridge's or Wordsworth's or Shelley's. No good criticism of Lamb, strictly speaking, can ever be written ; because nobody can do justice to his work who does not love it too well to feel himself capable of giving judgment on it. And if such a reader as this should undertake to enter the lists against any of Lamb's detractors, or to engage in debate with any of his half-hearted and semi-supercilious partisans, he would doubtless find himself driven or tempted to break all bounds of critical reason in his panegyric of a genius so beloved. Question or denial of Lamb's dramatic powers might goad him on to maintain that *John Woodvil* is the only tragedy in the language which may properly be set beside *Hamlet*, and *The Wife's Trial* the one comedy which may hold its own if compared with *Much Ado about Nothing*. Let me not be suspected of any desire to maintain this thesis if I avow my enjoyment and admiration of Lamb's tragedy, his comedy, and his farce. Of his essays and letters, humorous or pathetic, prosaic or fantastic, erratic or composed, what is there to be said but that it would be a feat far easier to surpass all others than to approach the best of these ? But the truth is simple and indisputable that no labour could be at once so delightful and so useless, so attractive and so vain, as the task of writing in praise of Lamb. Any man or any child who can feel anything of his charm utters better praise of him in silence than any array of epithets or periods could give. Any man or any woman who can feel nothing of his charm is outside the pale of any possible influence or impression from any

reasoning or any enthusiasm of others. Genius and goodness, self-sacrifice and love, sweet and stingless humour, joyful kindness and patient endurance, could not but make of Charles and Mary Lamb two figures most obnoxious and contemptible to that very sorry pair of phenomena, Thomas Cloacinus and his Goody. 'This was a sham strong man,' said Carlyle—very justly—of Byron: and equal justice echoes back the verdict as retorted on Carlyle. The true strong man whose whole life was an act of love, an offering of faithful and grateful affection which gave all it had and felt that it could not give enough, what other recognition or what fitter acknowledgment could he receive from such as these than their distaste and their contempt? What they had to give they gave him; that so nothing might be wanting of the tribute due from inferiors as from equals, from strangers as from friends, to the very sweetest nature that ever gave warmth and fragrance to the quiet and quenchless light of so rare and pure a genius. But it may well be that the Essays of Elia will be found to have kept their perfume, and the letters of Charles Lamb to retain their old sweet savour, when *Sartor Resartus* has about as many readers as Bulwer's *Artificial Changeling* and nine-tenths even of *Don Juan* lie darkening under the same deep dust that covers the rarely troubled pages of the *Secchia Rapita*. One thing is very certain, which it needs no inspiration to foresee and no presumption to foretell: that whether the number of his loving readers be greater or be less in any time to come, be the quantity of their muster what it may, the quality of their affection must always be the same. The 'cordial old man,' whose 'tripping tongue,' heard 'once, and once

only,' woke so deep an echo of regard from the noble heart of Landor, will never be loved a little or honoured with a temperate esteem. Not all, it may be, who share his love and his understanding of Shakespeare or of Hogarth, can be expected to love him likewise: but surely nothing less than this may be looked for from all whom he has led to the sealed and hidden fountains of English dramatic poetry; from all to whom he has opened that passionate and stormy paradise, the turbulent and radiant heaven of our elder tragic writers: for a very heaven it is to those who can breathe its 'eager air,' a very paradise to such as can walk unhurt among its flaming fires. That a Lamb should have gone in among these lions, and become as it were the keeper of the lions' den, is a chance which provokes the inevitable application of his own favourite form of jest: but it is to be remembered that the one other writer who ever shared with 'the gentle Elia' the common or habitual surname bestowed by that soft-sounding epithet is none other than Shakespeare himself. Gentleness such as Shakespeare's or as Lamb's implies a strength beside which the braggardism of a stoic whose Porch is of stucco, for all his swashing and martial outside of painted blood and imitated iron, proves worse than womanish weakness. Carlyle says of his friend Sterling that during his brief career as a clergyman he was ever striving with all his might 'not to be a moonshine shadow of the first Paul:' it may be said—by the disbelievers in his pseudosophy—that Carlyle's own 'realized ideal' was to be a moonshine shadow of the first Knox. No man ever had less about him of pretention, philosophic or other, than Charles Lamb: but when he took on him to grapple in spirit

with Shakespeare, and with Shakespeare's fellows or followers, the author of *John Woodvil*, who might till then have seemed to unsympathetic readers of that little tragedy no more than the 'moonshine shadow' of an Elizabethan playwright, showed himself the strongest as well as the finest critic that ever was found worthy to comment on the most masculine or leonine school of poets in all the range of English literature. With the gentler natures among them—with the sweet spirit of Dekker or of Heywood, of Davenport or of Day—we should naturally have expected him to feel and to approve his affinity; but even more than towards these do we find him attracted towards the strongest and most terrible of all the giant brood: and this by no effeminate attraction towards horrors, no morbid and liquorish appetite for visions of blood or images of agony; but by the heroic or poetic instinct of sympathy with 'high actions and high passions,' with the sublimity of suffering and the extravagance of love, which gave him power to read aright such poetry as to Campbell was a stumbling-block and to Hallam foolishness. Marlowe with his Faustus, Marston with his Andrugio, Tourneur with his Vindice, Ford with his Calantha, Webster, above all, with his two sovereign types of feminine daring and womanly endurance, the heroine of suffering and the heroine of sin: these are they whom he has interpreted and made known to us in such words as alone could seem deserving, for truth and for beauty, for subtlety and for strength, to be heard by way of interlude between the softer and the sterner harmonies of their Titanic text. Truly and thankfully may those whose boyish tastes have been strengthened with such mental food and

quickened with such spiritual wine—the meat so carved and garnished, the cup so tempered and poured out, by such a master and founder of the feast—bear witness and give thanks to so great and so generous a benefactor; who has fed us on lion's marrow, and with honey out of the lion's mouth. To him and to him alone it is that we owe the revelation and the resurrection of our greatest dramatic poets after Shakespeare. All those who have done hard and good work in the same field, from the date of Mr. Collier's supplementary volume to Dodsley down to the present date of Mr. Bullen's no less thankworthy collection of costly waifs and strays redeemed at last from mouldering manuscript or scarce less inaccessible print—all to whom we owe anything of good service in this line owe to Lamb the first example of such toil, the first indication of such treasure. He alone opened the golden vein alike for students and for sciolists: he set the fashion of real or affected interest in our great forgotten poets. Behind him and beneath we see the whole line of conscientious scholars and of imitative rhetoricians: the Hazlitts prattling at his heel, the Dyces labouring in his wake. If the occasional harvest of these desultory researches were his one and only claim on the regard of Englishmen, this alone should suffice to ensure him their everlasting respect and their unalterable gratitude: and this is as small a part as it is a precious one of his priceless legacy to all time. The sweet spontaneous grace of his best poetry has never been surpassed: for subtle and simple humour, for tender and cordial wit, his essays and letters have never been approached: as a critic, Coleridge alone has ever equalled or excelled him in delicacy and strength of

insight, and Coleridge has excelled or equalled him only when writing on Shakespeare: of Shakespeare's contemporaries Lamb was as much the better judge as he was the steadier, the deeper, and the more appreciative student. A wise enthusiasm gave only the sharper insight to his love, the keener edge to his judgment: and the rare composition of all such highest qualities as we find scattered or confused in others raised criticism in his case to the level of creation, and made his lightest word more weighty than all the labouring wisdom of any judge less gracious, any reader less inspired than Charles Lamb.

LANDOR.

WALTER SAVAGE LANDOR, born at Warwick, January 30, 1775, died at Florence, September 17, 1864. In the course of this long life he had won for himself such a double crown of glory in verse and in prose as has been worn by no other Englishman but Milton. And with that special object of his lifelong veneration he had likewise in common other claims upon our reverence to which no third competitor among English poets can equally pretend. He had the same constancy to the same principles, the same devotion to the same ideal of civic and heroic life; the same love, the same loyalty, the same wrath, scorn, and hatred, for the same several objects respectively; the same faith in the example and kinship to the spirit of the republican Romans, the same natural enjoyment and mastery of their tongue. Not accident merely but attraction must in any case have drawn them to enlist in the ranks and serve under the standard of the ancient Latin army of patriots and poets. But to Landor even more than to Milton the service of the Roman Muse was a natural and necessary expression of his genius, a spontaneous and just direction of its full and exuberant forces. At the age of twenty he published an eloquent vindication of her claims upon the service and devotion of modern

writers—the first sketch or suggestion of a longer essay, to be published in its final form just fifty-two years later. In 1795 appeared in a small volume, 'divided into three books,' *The Poems of Walter Savage Landor*, and, in pamphlet form of nineteen pages, an anonymous *Moral Epistle, respectfully dedicated to Earl Stanhope.* No poet at the age of twenty ever had more vigour of style and fluency of verse; nor perhaps has any ever shown such masterly command of epigram and satire, made vivid and vital by the purest enthusiasm and most generous indignation. Three years later appeared the first edition of the first great work which was to inscribe his name for ever among the great names in English poetry. The second edition of *Gebir* appeared in 1803, with a text corrected of grave errors and improved by magnificent additions. About the same time the whole poem was also published in a Latin form, which for might and melody of line, for power and perfection of language, must always dispute the palm of precedence with the English version. In 1808, under an impulse not less heroic than that which was afterwards to lead Byron to a glorious death in redemption of Greece and his own good fame, Landor, then aged thirty-three, left England for Spain as a volunteer to serve in the national army against Napoleon at the head of a regiment raised and supported at his sole expense. After some three months' campaigning came the affair of Cintra and its disasters; 'his troop,' in the words of his biographer, 'dispersed or melted away, and he came back to England in as great a hurry as he had left it,' but bringing with him the honourable recollection of a brave design unselfishly attempted, and the material in

his memory for the sublimest poem published in our language between the last masterpiece of Milton and the first masterpiece of Shelley—one equally worthy to stand unchallenged beside either for poetic perfection as well as moral majesty—the lofty tragedy of *Count Julian*, which appeared in 1812, without the name of its author. No comparable work is to be found in English poetry between the date of *Samson Agonistes* and the date of *Prometheus Unbound*; and with both these great works it has some points of greatness in common. The superhuman isolation of agony and endurance which encircles and exalts the hero is in each case expressed with equally appropriate magnificence of effect. The style of *Count Julian*, if somewhat deficient in dramatic ease and the fluency of natural dialogue, has such might and purity and majesty of speech as elsewhere we find only in Milton so long and so steadily sustained.

In May 1811 Landor had suddenly married Miss Julia Thuillier, with whose looks he had fallen in love at first sight in a ball-room at Bath; and in June they settled for awhile at Llanthony Abbey in Wales, from whence he was worried in three years' time by the combined vexation of neighbours and tenants, lawyers and lords-lieutenant; not before much toil and money had been nobly wasted on attempts to improve the sterility of the land, to relieve the wretchedness and raise the condition of the peasantry. He left England for France at first, but after a brief residence at Tours took up his abode for three years at Como; 'and three more wandering years he passed,' says his biographer, 'between Pisa and Pistoja, before he pitched his tent in

Florence in 1821.' In 1824 appeared the first series of his *Imaginary Conversations*; in 1826 'the second edition, corrected and enlarged:' a supplementary third volume was added in 1828; and in 1829 the second series was given to the world. Not until 1846 was a fresh instalment added, in the second volume of his collected and selected works. During the interval he had published his three other most famous and greatest books in prose: *The Citation and Examination of William Shakespeare*, 1834; *Pericles and Aspasia*, 1836; *The Pentameron*, 1837. To the last of these was originally appended *The Pentalogia*, containing five of the very finest among his shorter studies in dramatic poetry. In 1847 he published his most important Latin work, *Poemata et Inscriptiones*, comprising, with large additions, the main contents of two former volumes of idyllic, satiric, elegiac, and lyric verse; and in the same golden year of his poetic life appeared the very crown and flower of its manifold labours, *The Hellenics of Walter Savage Landor*, enlarged and completed. Twelve years later this book was reissued, with additions of more or less value, with alterations generally to be regretted, and with omissions invariably to be deplored. In 1853 he put forth *The Last Fruit off an Old Tree*, containing fresh conversations, critical and controversial essays, miscellaneous epigrams, lyrics, and occasional poems of various kind and merit, closing with *Five Scenes* on the martyrdom of Beatrice Cenci, unsurpassed even by their author himself for noble and heroic pathos, for subtle and genial, tragic and profound, ardent and compassionate insight into character, with consummate mastery of dramatic and spiritual truth.

In 1856 he published *Antony and Octavius—Scenes for the Study*, twelve consecutive poems in dialogue which alone would suffice to place him high among the few great masters of historic drama. In 1858 appeared a metrical miscellany bearing the title of *Dry Sticks Fagoted by W. S. Landor*, and containing among other things graver and lighter certain epigrammatic and satirical attacks which reinvolved him in the troubles of an action for libel ; and in July of the same year he returned for the last six years of his life to Italy, which he had left for England in 1835. Embittered and distracted by domestic dissensions, if brightened and relieved by the affection and veneration of friends and strangers, this final period of his troubled and splendid career came at last to a quiet end on the 17th (as aforesaid) of September, 1864. In the preceding year he had published a last volume of *Heroic Idyls, with additional poems*, English and Latin ; the better part of them well worthy to be indeed the 'last fruit' of a genius which after a life of eighty-eight years had lost nothing of its majestic and pathetic power, its exquisite and exalted loveliness.

A complete list of Landor's writings, published or privately printed, in English, Latin, and Italian, including pamphlets, fly-sheets, and occasional newspaper correspondence on political or literary questions, it would be difficult to give anywhere and impossible to give here. From nineteen almost to ninety his intellectual and literary activity was indefatigably incessant ; but, herein at least like Charles Lamb, whose cordial admiration he so cordially returned, he could not write a note of three lines which did not bear the mark of his ' Roman hand ' in its

matchless and inimitable command of a style at once the most powerful and the purest of his age. The one charge which can ever seriously be brought and maintained against it is that of such occasional obscurity or difficulty as may arise from excessive strictness in condensation of phrase and expurgation of matter not always superfluous, and sometimes almost indispensable. His English prose and his Latin verse are perhaps more frequently and more gravely liable to this charge than either his English verse or his Latin prose. At times it is wellnigh impossible for an eye less keen and swift, a scholarship less exquisite and ready than his own, to catch the precise direction and follow the perfect course of his rapid thought and radiant utterance. This apparently studious pursuit and preference of the most terse and elliptic expression which could be found for anything he might have to say could not but occasionally make even so sovereign a master of two great languages appear 'dark with excess of light;' but from no former master of either tongue in prose or verse was ever the quality of real obscurity, of loose and nebulous incertitude, more utterly alien or more naturally remote. There is nothing of cloud or fog about the path on which he leads us; but we feel now and then the want of a bridge or a hand-rail; we have to leap from point to point of narrative or argument without the usual help of a connecting plank. Even in his dramatic works, where least of all it should have been found, this lack of visible connection or sequence in details of thought or action is too often a source of sensible perplexity. In his noble trilogy on the history of Giovanna Queen of Naples it is sometimes actually difficult to realize on a first reading what has

happened or is happening, or how, or why, or by what agency—a defect alone sufficient, but unhappily sufficient in itself, to explain the too general ignorance of a work so rich in subtle and noble treatment of character, so sure and strong in its grasp and rendering of 'high actions and high passions,' so rich in humour and in pathos, so royally serene in its commanding power upon the tragic mainsprings of terror and of pity. As a poet, he may be said on the whole to stand midway between Byron and Shelley,—about as far above the former as below the latter. If we except Catullus and Simonides, it might be hard to match and it would be impossible to overmatch the flawless and blameless yet living and breathing beauty of his most perfect elegies, epigrams, or epitaphs. As truly as prettily was he likened by Leigh Hunt 'to a stormy mountain pine which should produce lilies.' His passionate compassion, his bitter and burning pity for all wrongs endured in all the world, found only their natural and inevitable outlet in his life-long defence or advocacy of tyrannicide as the last resource of baffled justice, the last discharge of heroic duty. His tender and ardent love of children, of animals, and of flowers, makes fragrant alike the pages of his writing and the records of his life. He was as surely the most gentle and generous as the most headstrong and hot-headed of heroes or of men. Nor ever was any man's best work more thoroughly imbued and informed with evidence of his noblest qualities. His loyalty and liberality of heart were as inexhaustible as his bounty and beneficence of hand. Praise and encouragement, deserved or undeserved, came yet more readily to his lips than challenge or defiance. Reviled and ridiculed

by Lord Byron, he retorted on the offender living less readily and less warmly than he lamented and extolled him dead. On the noble dramatic works of his brother Robert he lavished a magnificence of sympathetic praise which his utmost self-estimate would never have exacted for his own. Age and the lapse of time could neither heighten nor lessen the fullness of this rich and ready generosity. To the poets of his own and of the next generation he was not readier to do honour than to those of a later growth, and not seldom of deserts far lower and far lesser claims than theirs. That he was not unconscious of his own, and avowed it with the frank simplicity of nobler times, is not more evident or more certain than that in comparison with his friends and fellows he was liable rather to undervalue than to overrate himself. He was a classic, and no formalist; the wide range of his just and loyal admiration had room for a genius so far from classical as Blake's. Nor in his own highest mood or method of creative as of critical work was he a classic only, in any narrow or exclusive sense of the term. On either side, immediately or hardly below his mighty masterpiece of *Pericles and Aspasia*, stand the two scarcely less beautiful and vivid studies of mediæval Italy and Shakespearean England. The very finest flower of his immortal dialogues is probably to be found in the single volume comprising only 'Imaginary Conversations of Greeks and Romans;' his utmost command of passion and pathos may be tested by its transcendent success in the distilled and concentrated tragedy of *Tiberius and Vipsania*, where for once he shows a quality more proper to romantic than classical imagination—the subtle and sublime and terrible power

to enter the dark vestibule of distraction, to throw the whole force of his fancy, the whole fire of his spirit, into the 'shadowing passion' (as Shakespeare calls it) of gradually imminent insanity. Yet, if this and all other studies from ancient history or legend could be subtracted from the volume of his work, enough would be left whereon to rest the foundation of a fame which time could not sensibly impair.

KEATS.

JOHN KEATS, born October 29, 1795, published his first volume of verse in 1817, his second in the following year, his third in 1820, and died of consumption at Rome, February 23, 1821, in the fourth month of his twenty-sixth year. In his first book there was little foretaste of anything greatly or even genuinely good; but between the marshy and sandy flats of sterile or futile verse there were undoubtedly some few purple patches of floral promise. The style was frequently detestable—a mixture of sham Spenserian and mock Wordsworthian, alternately florid and arid. His second book, *Endymion*, rises in its best passages to the highest level of Barnfield and of Lodge, the two previous poets with whom, had he published nothing more, he might most properly have been classed; and this, among minor minstrels, is no unenviable place. His third book raised him at once to a foremost rank in the highest class of English poets. Never was any one of them but Shelley so little of a marvellous boy and so suddenly revealed as a marvellous man. Never has any poet suffered so much from the chaotic misarrangement of his poems in every collected edition.[1] The

[1] This negligence has been remedied since the first appearance of this notice, and a more rational arrangement has been adopted.

rawest and the rankest rubbish of his fitful spring is bound up in one sheaf with the ripest ears, flung into one basket with the richest fruits, of his sudden and splendid summer. The *Ode to a Nightingale*, one of the final masterpieces of human work in all time and for all ages, is immediately preceded in all editions now current by some of the most vulgar and fulsome doggrel ever whimpered by a vapid and effeminate rhymester in the sickly stage of whelphood. Shelley, up to twenty, had written little or nothing that would have done credit to a boy of ten; and of Keats also it may be said that the merit of his work at twenty-five was hardly by comparison more wonderful than its demerit at twenty-two. His first book fell as flat as it deserved to fall; the reception of his second, though less considerate than on the whole it deserved, was not more contemptuous than that of immeasurably better books published about the same time by Coleridge, Landor, and Shelley. A critic of exceptional carefulness and candour might have noted in the first book so singular an example of a stork among the cranes as the famous and noble sonnet on Chapman's Homer; a just judge would have indicated, a partial advocate might have exaggerated, the value of such golden grain amid a garish harvest of tares as the hymn to Pan and the translation into verse of Titian's Bacchanal which glorify the weedy wilderness of *Endymion*. But the hardest thing said of that poem by the *Quarterly* reviewer was unconsciously echoed by the future author of *Adonais*,—that it was all but absolutely impossible to read through; and the obscener insolence of the 'Blackguard's Magazine,' as Landor afterwards very justly labelled it, is explicable

though certainly not excusable if we glance back at such a passage as that where Endymion exchanges fulsome and liquorish endearments with the 'known unknown *from whom his being sips such darling* (*!*) *essence*.' Such nauseous and pitiful phrases as these, and certain passages in his correspondence, make us understand the source of the most offensive imputations or insinuations levelled against the writer's manhood ; and, while admitting that neither his love-letters, nor the last piteous outcries of his wailing and shrieking agony, would ever have been made public by merciful or respectful editors, we must also admit that, if they ought never to have been published, it is no less certain that they ought never to have been written ; that a manful kind of man or even a manly sort of boy, in his love-making or in his suffering, will not howl and snivel after such a lamentable fashion. One thing hitherto inexplicable a very slight and rapid glance at his amatory correspondence will amply suffice to explain : how it came to pass that the woman so passionately beloved by so great a poet should have thought it the hopeless attempt of a mistaken kindness to revive the memory of a man for whom the best that could be wished was complete and compassionate oblivion. For the side of the man's nature presented to her inspection, this probably was all that charity or reason could have desired. But that there was a finer side to the man, even if considered apart from the poet, his correspondence with his friends and their general evidence to his character give more sufficient proof than perhaps we might have derived from the general impression left on us by his works ; though indeed the preface to *Endymion* itself, however illogical

in its obviously implied suggestion that the poem published was undeniably unworthy of publication, gave proof or hint at least that after all its author was something of a man. And the eighteenth of his letters to Miss Brawne stands out in bright and brave contrast to such as seem incompatible with the traditions of his character on its manlier side. But if it must be said that he lived long enough only to give promise of being a man, it must also be said that he lived long enough to give assurance of being a poet who was not born to come short of the first rank. Not even a hint of such a probability could have been gathered from his first or even from his second appearance; after the publication of his third volume it was no longer a matter of possible debate among judges of tolerable competence that this improbability had become a certainty. Two or three phrases cancelled, two or three lines erased, would have left us in *Lamia* one of the most faultless as surely as one of the most brilliant jewels in the crown of English poetry. *Isabella*, feeble and awkward in narrative to a degree almost incredible in a student of Dryden and a pupil of Leigh Hunt, is overcharged with episodical effects of splendid and pathetic expression beyond the reach of either. *The Eve of St. Agnes*, aiming at no doubtful success, succeeds in evading all casual difficulty in the line of narrative; with no shadow of pretence to such interest as may be derived from stress of incident or depth of sentiment, it stands out among all other famous poems as a perfect and unsurpassable study in pure colour and clear melody —a study in which the figure of Madeline brings back upon the mind's eye, if only as moonlight recalls

a sense of sunshine, the nuptial picture of Marlowe's Hero and the sleeping presence of Shakespeare's Imogen. Beside this poem should always be placed the less famous but not less precious *Eve of St. Mark*, a fragment unexcelled for the simple perfection of its perfect simplicity, exquisite alike in suggestion and in accomplishment The triumph of *Hyperion* is as nearly complete as the failure of *Endymion*; yet Keats never gave such proof of a manly devotion and rational sense of duty to his art as in his resolution to leave this great poem unfinished; not, as we may gather from his correspondence on the subject, for the pitiful reason assigned by his publishers, that of discouragement at the reception given to his former work, but on the solid and reasonable ground that a Miltonic study had something in its very scheme and nature too artificial, too studious of a foreign influence, to be carried on and carried out at such length as was implied by his original design. Fortified and purified as it had been on a first revision, when much introductory allegory and much tentative effusion of sonorous and superfluous verse had been rigorously clipped down or pruned away, it could not long have retained spirit enough to support or inform the shadowy body of a subject so little charged with tangible significance. The faculty of assimilation as distinguished from imitation, than which there can be no surer or stronger sign of strong and sure original genius, is not more evident in the most Miltonic passages of the revised *Hyperion* than in the more Shakespearean passages of the unrevised tragedy which no radical correction could have left other than radically incorrigible. It is no conventional exaggeration, no hyperbolical

phrase of flattery with more sound than sense in it, to say that in this boyish and fantastic play of *Otho the Great* there are such verses as Shakespeare might not without pride have signed at the age when he wrote and even at the age when he rewrote the tragedy of *Romeo and Juliet*. The dramatic fragment of *King Stephen* shows far more power of hand and gives far more promise of success than does that of Shelley's *Charles the First*. Yet we cannot say with any confidence that even this far from extravagant promise would certainly or probably have been kept; it is certain only that Keats in these attempts did at least succeed in showing a possibility of future excellence as a tragic or at least a romantic dramatist. In every other line of high and serious poetry his triumph was actual and consummate; here only was it no more than potential or incomplete. As a ballad of the more lyrical order, *La belle Dame sans Merci* is not less absolutely excellent, less triumphantly perfect in force and clearness of impression, than as a narrative poem is *Lamia*. In his lines on Robin Hood, and in one or two other less noticeable studies of the kind, he has shown thorough and easy mastery of the beautiful metre inherited by Fletcher from Barnfield and by Milton from Fletcher. The simple force of spirit and style which distinguishes the genuine ballad manner from all spurious attempts at an artificial simplicity was once more at least achieved in his verses on the crowning creation of Scott's humaner and manlier genius—Meg Merrilies. No little injustice has been done to Keats by such devotees as fix their mind's eye only on the more salient and distinctive notes of a genius which in fact was very much more various

and tentative, less limited and peculiar, than would be inferred from an exclusive study of his more specially characteristic work. But within the limits of that work must we look of course for the genuine credentials of his fame ; and highest among them we must rate his unequalled and unrivalled odes. Of these perhaps the two nearest to absolute perfection, to the triumphant achievement and accomplishment of the very utmost beauty possible to human words, may be that to Autumn and that on a Grecian Urn ; the most radiant, fervent, and musical is that to a Nightingale ; the most pictorial and perhaps the tenderest in its ardour of passionate fancy is that to Psyche ; the subtlest in sweetness of thought and feeling is that on Melancholy. Greater lyrical poetry the world may have seen than any that is in these ; lovelier it surely has never seen, nor ever can it possibly see. From the divine fragment of an unfinished ode to Maia we can but guess that if completed it would have been worthy of a place beside the highest. His remaining lyrics have many beauties about them, but none perhaps can be called thoroughly beautiful. He has certainly left us one perfect sonnet of the first rank; and as certainly he has left us but one.

Keats, on high and recent authority, has been promoted to a place beside Shakespeare ; and it was long since remarked by some earlier critic of less note that as a painter of flowers his touch had almost a Shakespearean felicity,—recalling, a writer in our own day might have added, the hand of M. Fantin on canvas. The faultless force and the profound subtlety of this deep and cunning instinct for the absolute expression of absolute natural beauty can hardly be questioned or

overlooked ; and this is doubtless the one main distinctive gift or power which denotes him as a poet among all his equals, and gives him right to a station near that of Coleridge and Shelley. As a man, the two admirers who have done best service to his memory are, first and far foremost, Lord Houghton, and secondly Mr. Matthew Arnold. These alone, among all who have written of him without the disadvantage or advantage of a personal acquaintance, have clearly seen and shown us the manhood of the man. That ridiculous and degrading legend which imposed so strangely on the generous tenderness of Shelley, while evoking the very natural and allowable laughter of Byron, fell to dust at once for ever on the appearance of that admirable and unsurpassed biography which gave perfect proof to all time that 'men have died and worms have eaten them,' but not for fear of critics or through suffering inflicted by reviews. Somewhat too sensually sensitive he may have been in either capacity, but the nature of the man was as far as was the quality of the poet above the pitiful level of a creature whose soul could 'let itself be snuffed out by an article'; and in fact, owing doubtless to the accident of a death which followed so fast on his early appearance and his dubious reception as a poet, the insolence and injustice of his reviewers in general have been comparatively and even considerably exaggerated. Except from the chief fountain-head of professional ribaldry then open in the world of literary journalism, no reek of personal insult arose to offend his nostrils ; and then as now the tactics of such unwashed malignants were inevitably suicidal ; the references to his brief experiment of apprenticeship to a surgeon

which are quoted from *Blackwood* in the shorter as well as in the longer memoir by Lord Houghton could leave no bad odour behind them save what might hang about men's yet briefer recollection of his assailant's unmemorable existence. The false Keats, therefore, whom Shelley pitied and Byron despised would have been, had he ever existed, a thing beneath compassion or contempt. That such a man could have had such a genius is almost evidently impossible; and yet more evident is the proof which remains on everlasting record that none was ever further from the chance of decline to such degradation than the real and actual man who made that name immortal.

TENNYSON AND MUSSET.

WHEN the history of poetry in this age shall be written by the critical chroniclers of the next, one thing will of necessity be noted as distinctive of its latter years: the singular and splendid persistence of genius and prolongation of working power in the greatest of those great writers who were born in the infancy or in the adolescence of the nineteenth century. Its eighty-first year bestowed on us not only a new poem from the hand of its mightiest master, but also a volume which did more than sustain—which actually magnified and heightened —the fame of Wordsworth's successor as poet laureate of England. It is no rare or strange experience for an admirer of noble work to feel deeply the inadequacy of language to express the depth and translate the fervour of admiration: and never assuredly was any poor penman of the humblest order more inwardly conscious of such impotence in his words to sustain the weight of their intention, than was the present writer of his inability to cast into any shape of articulate speech the impression and the emotion produced by the first reading of Tennyson's *Rizpah*. To him it seemed then that never since the very beginning of all poetry were the twin passions of terror and pity more divinely done into deathless words or set to more perfect and profound

magnificence of music; never more inseparably fused and harmonized into more absolute and sublime identity: that the poet never lived on earth whose glory would not be heightened by the attribution of this poem to his hand: that thousands of readers for centuries to come would be moved by it to trembling and to tears. I did not, even then, forget the fact that prediction of this kind was proverbially futile: but it should also be remembered that art has her certainties no less absolute than those of science: and that this was one of them the judgment which could hesitate to affirm must surely, I thought,—so strong was the instant impression of tragic pity and terror—be either cancerous with malevolence or paralytic with stupidity. Some indeed may probably be found to object that pity is here strained and racked into actual and intolerable anguish—that terror here darkens and condenses into sheer physical pain and horror: and, doubtless, of no contemporary writer can it be so truly said—nor can it be said more truly of any writer in time past—that he has 'created a new shudder'; a pang of piercing and dreadful compassion which cleaves as it were the very core of 'the spirit of sense' in sunder. But here is one more proof—and a proof beyond all price and beyond all question—that passion and imagination are justified of all their children. Were it not so, the very crowning glory of this most pathetic and terrible poem would be frightful rather than terrible, and unbearable rather than pathetic. As it is, those four central and consummating lines, unspeakably pitiful and unutterably beautiful, are made endurable, and therefore in some deeper sense delightful, by sheer force of genius alone. They cannot be separately

transcribed—wrenched out of their natural framework, or torn off the stem of thorns on which they set the topmost crown of tear-drenched and passion-coloured blossom. But six words of them—the six last words, 'they had moved in my side'—give perfect proof once more of the deep truth that great poets are bisexual; male and female at once, motherly not less than fatherly in their instincts towards little children; from the day when Homer put Astyanax into the arms of Hector to the day when Hugo found the sweetest of all cradle-songs on the lips of the death-stricken Fantine. And among all these not one—not even Victor Hugo's very self—has ever touched the very deepest and finest chord on the lyre of the human spirit with a diviner power, a more godlike strength of tenderness, than Tennyson has touched it here. Nothing more piteous, more passionate, more adorable for intensity of beauty, was ever before this wrought by human cunning into the likeness of such words as words are powerless to praise.

Two consequences, each of some little importance to students of poetry, though to a writer of Lord Tennyson's rank and station they may be personally indifferent and insignificant enough, should follow on the appearance of such a poem as this. First, there must be an end for ever on all hands to the once debateable question whether the author can properly be called in the strictest sense a great poet, or whether his admirers should be content with the application to their master of such commendatory epithets as 'a fine, a gracious, an exquisite poet.' If after a thousand years all trace of all his poems had vanished from all human record, save only

these eighty-six verses of *Rizpah*, proof positive and ample and overflowing would be left in the survival of these that in the author of this single poem a truly great poet had been born. And secondly there must be an end, for ever and a day beyond at least, of a question which once was even more hotly debateable than this: the long contested question of poetic precedence between Alfred Tennyson and Alfred de Musset. Four lines of *Rizpah*, placed in one scale of the balance of judgment, would send all the loveliest verse of Musset flying up in the other, to kick the beam and vanish. Of passion such as this he knew no more than he knew of such execution. He was about as capable of either as of writing *Ratbert*, *The Cenci*, or *King Lear*.

It would seem to follow from this, if such a decision be accepted as equitable, that any comparison of claims between the two men must be unprofitable in itself, as well as unfair to the memory of the lesser poet. But it needs no great expense of argument to prove that such is by no means the case. We cannot, in any fair estimate of the two rival claimants, omit or neglect to take account of the rich legacy left by Musset in the province of imaginative prose, narrative and dramatic. And when we have thus taken account of all his various and exquisite work on those lines—so delicate, so subtle, so supple, so gaily grave and so fancifully pensive, so full of inspired ease and instinctive ability, it becomes more difficult to trim the balance with absolute security of hand; especially when we consider that all this charming work, without ever once touching on the detestable as well as debateable land of pseudo-poetic rhapsody in hermaphroditic prose after the least admirable

manner of such writers as De Quincey, is always, so to speak, impregnated and permeated with something of a genuinely poetical sense or spirit. Grace and sweetness never fail him in any part of his work which any kindly reader would care to remember.

Heine, that snake of the Hebrew Paradise, — a 'smooth-lipped serpent, surely high inspired'—was never inspired more truly by the serpent's genius of virulent wisdom than when he uttered, in a most characteristic hiss of sarcasm, a sentence as conclusive in its judgment as venomous in its malignity, describing Musset before he had reached middle age as 'a young man with a very fine career—behind him' (*un jeune homme d'un bien beau passé*). Never was there a truer, as assuredly there never was a crueller witticism. Brilliant and early as was the first flight of the future Lord Tennyson above the bright circle of his early college friends and admirers —a circle then doubtless very plausibly definable by nameless curs of letters as a 'mutual-admiration society,' artificially heated by the steam of reciprocal incense for the incubation of 'coterie glory,' the simultaneous dawn of Musset on the far more splendid horizon of contemporary Paris was itself as far more splendid than the sunrise over Cambridge of *Poems chiefly Lyrical*. When all due deductions and reserves are made, it remains undeniable that the world of letters has hardly ever seen such a first book as the *Contes d'Espagne et d'Italie*. Its very faults were promises—unhappily too soon to be falsified—of riper and not less radiant excellence to come. Of all thin and shallow criticisms, none ever was shallower or thinner than that which would describe these firstlings of Musset's genius as mere Byronic

echoes. In that case they would be tuneless as their original: whereas they are the notes of a singer who cannot but sing—though perhaps they gave no great evidence that he could do much else. But of all poems written in youth these are perhaps the likeliest or rather the surest for a season to stir the brain and sting the blood of adolescence. To do them justice, they should be first read at the age of eighteen—or twenty at latest. After Catullus and Ovid, there is probably no poet with whose influence a pious parent or a judicious preceptor should be so anxious to imbue or may be so confident of imbuing the innocent mind of ingenuous youth. He has more than the audacious charm and seductive impudence of Chérubin; and the graceless Grace who served his boyhood for a Muse had some half-a-dozen nightingale notes in the compass of her voice which in clear sheer quality of blithe and birdlike spontaneity were beyond the reach of Tennyson's. But when the pretty page of Thackeray's ballad grows bearded and then bald, it remains to be tried what manner of brain was ripening under the curly gold locks of his nonage. And 'in such things' as the too splendid and showy puberty of a Musset

> There is a rotten ripeness supervenes
> On the first moment of maturity.

Unjust or barely just in its original application to one who lived to show himself 'bravest at the last,' and far other than a 'passionate weakling,' another couplet of Sir Henry Taylor's is exactly significant of the later emotion felt towards Musset by men whom he naturally fascinated before their own minds were *hors de page*.

I heard the sorrowful sensualist complain,
If with compassion, not without disdain.

To Musset, of all men, this rebuke was most applicable. For such a sufferer as the author of *Rolla* contempt no sooner thaws into compassion than compassion freezes back into contempt. And the next instant, as in my own case at this moment of writing, the fresh crust of curdling scorn begins again to soften and dissolve under the warm spring wind of pity. It is for Musset alone among poets that this exact shade of feeling is possible to men at once charitable and rational. With all his condemnable errors and all his damnable defects, Byron is of course as much above such an estimate as the parasites and plagiarists of his own day or of ours are below it; towering as far beyond contempt as they grovel beneath compassion. Nor could it be said of Musset, as of such an one as these, with much less injustice than it could be said of Byron, that his smile is the smirk of a liquorish fribble, his wail the whimper of a cheated cully. But it is too true that when his pagehood was over he was hardly fit to do much more than sob and sneer. 'Triste, en vérité,' as the abbé says in *Les Marrons du Feu*: but not less true than grievous. In the most charming and daring of all boyish poets there was less than little of the making of a man.

It is true that he could weep very musically. For sweetness and fullness and melody of feeling and thought and language it would be hard to match his *Souvenir* among the elegiac works of poets not absolutely and altogether his superiors. Nor has too much praise been given, though evidently too much would have been given if it could, to those four limpid rillets from the famous

Lake of Lamartine, his now no less famous *Nights*. At the same time it is natural and allowable to wonder what manner of work this magical musician's hand would have found to do if neither Byron nor Lamartine nor one far greater than a thousand such as these had invented instruments for the expression of feeling or of thought, which hung sometimes within reach of his delicate and skilful fingers. Starting in life as page to Victor Hugo, he never rose higher in sustained poetry than when he figured as henchman to Lamartine. Always conceding and remembering this, we can hardly overpraise either the freshest of his earlier works or the tenderest of his later. But it by no means follows that we are to accept him on the authority of M. Taine as an exponent of the spirit and the need of his age or of his nation. For on this ground it is, if I have read his argument aright, that the distinguished French historian of English letters would assert for his countryman a right to a higher rank than Lord Tennyson's on the representative roll of their contemporaries. At his best, Musset is representative of nothing but himself; at his worst, if the hard clear bitter truth must be spoken out —as it must—without flinching, he represents the quintessence of those qualities, the consummation of those defects, which made possible in France the infamous rise, and inevitable the not less infamous fall, of the Lower Empire. But the retribution which awaited the display of these defects and the indulgence in these qualities was more terrible than the austerest of moral and patriotic singers—an Alcæus or a Dante, a Milton or a Wordsworth—could have dreamed of or desired for a recreant or a traitor to the common cause and honour of all high

poets. He lived to produce some of the vilest verses that ever blotted paper, in praise of the very meanest of all villains that ever disgraced even a throne. It really cheers and refreshes the memory to remember what a very bellman's copy of verses is *Le Songe d'Auguste*—the epithalamium of Augustulus Neronianus. That was the end of the blithe bright Muse of Fantasio; suicide by drowning, from off the broken bridge of sensual and servile sighs, in the Cloaca Lupanaris of a bastard Bonapartism. To such base uses may a poet return, who in the flower of his working days has thought himself too good to be put to any nobler use: too poetic to be a patriot, too æsthetic to be a partisan, too artistic to serve an earthly country or suffer in a human cause: his only country being Art, and his final cause being pleasure. And the end of these things is the rhymester's privilege of a spare stool at the imperial board, somewhat lower than the seats of Anicetus and Tigellinus.

It is not, of course, that the vileness of even such a subject as the praise of the vilest of mankind must of necessity make vile the execution of a parasite's verses. Even Napoleon the Last, shameful as it is to say, had some good verses written on him, and more on his wife and child, in a different key from that of the deathless and deadly *Châtiments* on which the fame of his infamy is founded, to endure till time shall be no more. But most certainly they were not written by Alfred de Musset. It is grievous to remember, and impossible to forget, that they were written by Théophile Gautier. And yet his were not, like Musset's, the verses of a mere parasite. The birth of an ill-starred boy and the display of a popular charity seduced him into a short

strain or two of exquisite flattery and finish so perfect that in one of the manliest and most generous of poets and of men we may well for once 'excuse some courtly stains.' But, happily for the conscience of all honest critics, there is no such excuse for Musset. He might have been forgiven in 1838 his somewhat less pitiful verses of adulation on the birth of a prince to the House of Orleans, though assuredly they were but the verses of a poeticule: for poeticules love princelings as naturally as poets abhor tyrants: and the author of these verses was a poet no longer in any high or noble sense, to any great or worthy purpose. Already there was coming upon him the premature and unquiet decay which unmistakably denotes and inevitably chastises a youth not merely passionate or idle, sensual or self-indulgent, but prurient and indifferent, callous and effeminate at once. To this lowest deep, to this abject level of the actual sybarite and potential sycophant, a poet such as Burns or even a poet such as Byron could by no possibility descend. In them there was the salt of faith: at least of a possible faith in some conceivable object of manly and unselfish devotion. I would fain be no harder than I can help on the memory of a man whose genius in its prime was so beautiful and delightful: I had almost written that I would fain be less hard than the truth. I do not believe with Mr. Carlyle that 'the soft quality of mercy' can ever—except perhaps in cases of world-wide consequence, affecting the welfare of a nation and the conscience of mankind—be properly definable as 'thrice accursed:' and the misdoings or shortcomings of 'one poor poet,' whose 'scroll' was never by any means likely to 'shake the world' like that

of a Dante or a Milton, cannot certainly be held to come under this royal and imperial category. But it is well that we should remember, in the interests of truth even more than for the honour of poetry, how widely and how deeply different is the case of Musset from that of others whose career has been, if not wrecked, yet certainly mutilated and impaired, maimed of its promise and curtailed of its chance. Setting apart the names of those who were 'struck by the envious wrath of man or God'—leaving in their separate sphere the memories of Sidney, Chatterton, Keats, and the mightier mourner of all three—we cannot choose but note the vast gap of difference, a gulf neither to be bridged nor fathomed, which divides his case from that of a Byron or a Burns. Not through mere self-indulgence of the spirit or the flesh in active or visionary transgression—not by the offence or indiscretion of anything done or said or written, does a man incur the doom of irreversible degradation from the spiritual rank in which he was born, of dismissal from the mission and rejection from the goal for which he was made: but only through practical abnegation of his calling, and deliberate renunciation of his rank. Far less by what he has done and should have left undone will a man of genius be judged and condemned at the sessions of posterity or his peers, than by that which he should have done and has left undone for some contemptible or condemnable cause. There is no reason, as far as I know, to suppose that Musset was born with less than an average share of the higher human instincts; but there is every reason to infer that before he crossed the boundary of youth he had worn them all out or played them all away—had made him-

self spiritually and morally blind and deaf and impotent and idiotic: witness a certain recorded act of intercession (God save the mark!) on behalf of a banished man then sojourning in Guernsey, which deservedly drew down a brief word of most bitterly contemptuous disclaimer, to be forgotten when men forget the corresponding utterance of Dante.

Englishmen who have a well-grounded contempt for the national character of Frenchmen, and critics who have a well-founded contempt for the moral nature of poets, will rejoin that Musset was on these points a mere average example of his country and his kind: effeminate and prurient, egotistical and servile, in no greater and no less degree than might and would have been expected by a judicious and judicial Briton. To this the evidence of facts must answer, that in the display of these abject qualities the author of *Namouna* stands alone of his kind in his country. I make no objection to the existence of such a poem as this which I have just named, and which I find, of all poems read and admired in early youth, to be the one which will least endure reperusal and reconsideration in after years: I take it as perhaps the fairest and most popular sample of Musset at the full-flowing springtide of his genius. It would certainly be but bare justice to call it exquisite and graceful: and perhaps it might be unjust as well as Puritanical to call it effeminate or prurient. This latter adjective is an ugly epithet for a quality almost exclusively confined by nature to the race of ambiguous animals best known to anthropology as prudes: but, although Musset can hardly be classed and condemned as a member of their tribe, I am not sure that the im-

putation of prurience would be so absurdly misapplied in his case as in that of any other modern poet above the level of a pseudonymuncule. There is something in his tone which is unlike anything and alien from everything in the work, for instance, of Gautier and of Baudelaire. These two, the joyous teacher and the sombre pupil, the unsaintly Chrysostom of modern verse and the tragic dreamer of a spiritual desert, are safe from any such impeachment. I do not mean that the *Comédie de la Mort* must be ranked with the *Imitation of Christ*, or that the *Fleurs du Mal* should be bound up with the *Christian Year*. But I do say that no principle of art which does not exclude from its tolerance the masterpieces of Titian can logically or consistently reject the masterpieces of a poet who has paid to one of them the most costly tribute of carven verse, in lines of chiselled ivory with rhymes of ringing gold, that ever was laid by the high priest of one Muse on the high altar of another. And I must also maintain my opinion that the pervading note of spiritual tragedy in the brooding verse of Baudelaire dignifies and justifies at all points his treatment of his darkest and strangest subjects. This justification, this dignity, is wanting in the case of Musset. The atmosphere of his work is to the atmosphere of Gautier's as the air of a gas-lit alcove to the air of the far-flowering meadows that make in April a natural Field of the Cloth of Gold all round the happier poet's native town of Tarbes, radiant as the open scroll of his writings with immeasurable wealth of youth and sunlight and imperishable spring. The sombre starlight under which Baudelaire nursed and cherished the strange melancholy of his tropical home-sickness, with

its lurid pageant of gorgeous or of ghastly dreams, was perhaps equidistant from either of these, but assuredly had less in common with the lamplight than the sunshine.

At a too early date in the career of Musset it must have been evident to others besides his amiable Hebrew admirer that his Muse at all events 'n'avait plus rien dans le ventre,' and was most undeniably 'maigre à faire peur'—ou plutôt à faire pitié. The 'gentle Jew' might have added the remark, that never did poet come so soon to the proverbial 'bottom of his bag.' At an age when Lord Tennyson's good work was but begun, his brilliant French namesake and unconscious future rival had reached the stage which we may all be sure, and thankful to be sure, that Lord Tennyson will never reach at any time—when 'the wine of life is drawn, and the mere lees is left this vault to brag of.' A dreary vault it was in his case, clogged and overcharged with a thick and heavy reek of overhanging vapours. The gods did not love him, who would not let him die young in body as he died before his time in spirit.

The charge of this change, the blame of this collapse, was laid by himself, if we may trust the evidence of his brother, to the account of a stronger genius than his own. It was not a very manful confession or complaint for a man to make, but perhaps none the less likely on that account to be a truthful one in this instance. After reading the very sufficiently copious accounts which have been given us of the relations between George Sand and her victim or tormentor, others as well as the present writer may perhaps have come to the conclusion that much may be said on both sides, and little can be said for either side. Few probably

will admit the suggestion that this was a simple case of moral outrage perpetrated by George Lovelace upon Clarissa de Musset. As few who know anything of either will fail to admit that the usual parts were obviously inverted or reversed in the action of this dolorous tragicomedy: that, at least during their luckless residence in Venice, he was a woman and she was a man—in that kingdom by the sea. Not a very loveable woman—but assuredly not a very admirable man. I cannot think, in a word, that M. George behaved like the gentleman he usually showed himself to be—though doubtless a gentleman of whom it might too often be said that he loved and he rode away—in his affair with poor misguided Mlle. Elfride. And surely, when the unhappy girl was dead, it was unmanly on the part of her old keeper to revive the memory of her frailties.

Seriously,—though the subject has another than its serious side—if we are to accept the theory that the illustrious author of *Consuelo*, whom no one more admires and reveres at her best than I do, is not to be judged like another woman, it follows that she must be judged like another man. No genius can exempt a creature of either sex from this alternative necessity; he must be impaled on the one horn, or she on the other, of the sexual dilemma. Were the pretender to such exemption even Sappho instead of George Sand, even then under such circumstances our conscience would compel us to call it shameful that after Phaon had flung himself off the Leucadian rock Sappho should have defamed his memory by the publication of an autobiographical novel in the *Revue des Deux Îles*—Cyprus, let us suppose, and Lesbos. Surely the immolation of Chopin at the shrine

of *Lucrezia Floriani* might have satiated any not immoderate appetite for posthumous homicide or massacre of men's memories. But Thomyris of Scythia was a milkmaid or a school-girl to this 'moral Clytemnestra' of many more lords than one. Not twice but thrice—Alexander and Thais in one person—she routed all her lovers, and thrice she slew the slain. The woman at arms did but fling her dead enemy's head into a bowl of blood: the woman of letters flung the memories of her lovers—to borrow a phrase from Shakespeare—'into a pit of ink.' And if her own credit was sullied for a moment by the resulting splash, I cannot see that she had a grain of reason or a shadow of right to complain of it. Alexandre Dumas said more than once, and with undeniable accuracy, of George Sand, 'que son admirable génie était hermaphrodite comme la *Fragoletta* de son maître.'[1] But even though we should grant it all the gift of fascination by which Shelley was entranced at sight of 'that sweet marble monster of both sexes' which inspired her 'master' with the singular subject of his strange romance, it would by no means reasonably follow that we must regard this admirable genius as emancipated by the fact of this natural accident or unnatural portent from the inevitable responsibilities of either sex alike. We really cannot allow that a bisexual genius may freely, without fear of challenge or retort, play the part of the bat in the famous fable of La Fontaine. To no such intellectual or spiritual hermaphrodite can it ever be permissible to utter, even by implication, such a protest as this:—'I have a right to say what I please,—

[1] *Mémoires d'Alexandre Dumas*, deuxième série, tome xi., chap. vi., p. 125, ed. 1856.

for I am a man: but you have no right to reply,—for I am a woman.' At that rate the game of love or war or letters would have to be waged on terms really too unequal. Before the final bar of posthumous opinion, even so illustrious a hybrid as Madame Sand must make up its mind to be judged either as Diana (let us say) or as Endymion, as a Faun or as a Dryad, as lover or as mistress: George or Georgette, Cephalus or Aurora, Salmacis or Hermaphroditus. And in this case the ultimate verdict of judgment between these two literary lovers can in justice be no other than that which I have already ventured to anticipate: that probably he did not behave like a lady, but certainly she did not behave like a gentleman.

The fame of that great mistress of prose and the glory of this exquisite master of verse are alike so well assured that no honest utterance of a candid impression should now be taken to imply any injustice or irreverence towards either brilliant if not blameless memory. That the mannish woman was a nobler as well as a stronger creature than the womanish man—'outstepping his ten small steps with one stride'—seems to me on the whole as certain, when we weigh them on the whole together, life against life and work against work, as that in this rather miserable matter she was grossly and grievously in the wrong, by every law and by every instinct of manly or womanly duty or feeling. And if the lovely picture of a loving and loyal mistress, ill-used and ill-requited by the morbid ingratitude of a moody and wayward lover, which Musset has left us in his *Confession d'un Enfant du Siècle*, be accepted as his intended tribute of high-minded atonement and generous

regret, there can be few words too strong to condemn the disloyal cruelty if not the thankless indecency displayed in her subsequent disturbance of the dead. It needs all our recollection of the noble and beautiful work which we owe to her latest years—its womanly and manly patriotism, its wonderful survival of force and freshness in the play of fancy and the glow of affection, its childlike enjoyment and understanding of the nature and the tastes and the fancies of children—it needs all this that we find in such legacies as her *Théâtre de Nohant* and *Dernières Pages*, to make us condone what we can hardly understand in the composition of her strangely composite nature, and to make us feel that we may indulge without afterthought or scruple our instinct of grateful admiration and sometimes of loving enthusiasm for the sunnier side of her character and the higher aspect of her genius.

Nor is there less of beautiful and of good in the work of Musset to be set against the sorrier side of his life also. It must needs readjust the scales and rectify the balance of our judgment to remember and reconsider all his claims upon its indulgence, admiration, and thankfulness. The change which too plainly came over him, however it came about—the transformation from a Rafael Garuci, or a Fortunio of the brilliant *Chandelier*, into that dismallest of conceivable creatures, a 'Chérubin chauve' or morally broken-winded and bewigged Almaviva,—though, it can escape the notice of no reader, can as surely impair the merit of no masterpiece produced before the date of this decline. Perhaps the famous poem of *Rolla* may be taken as the landmark of that inevitable turning-point in a career which has made of

his memory the most notable and piteous example on record in all biographies that explain as best they may

> how certain bards were thralled
> —Buds blasted, but of breaths more like perfume
> Than Naddo's staring nosegay's carrion bloom ;
> Some insane rose that burnt heart out in sweets,
> A spendthrift in the spring, no summer greets ;
> Some Dularete, drunk with truths and wine,
> Grown bestial, dreaming how become divine.[1]

The overture to *Rolla*, down at least to the fourteenth line, is one of the very few jewels in its author's casket or feathers in his cap which may seem as admirable to a critic at forty as to a student at twenty. The radiance and vibration of the verse, its luminous rapture and living melody, could hardly be overpraised even by the overflowing generosity of Gautier, the poet of all poets, except Landor, who took most natural and most full delight in praising his masters and his peers. But I see nothing now to admire when he proceeds, as a poet of stouter heart and stronger hand than his has too justly expressed it, to 'fling in Voltaire's face the dregs of Rolla's absinthe,' and to whimper like a whipped hound over the cruel work of the men who shook the Cross and took away the Saviour. There is as it were a broken or fitful note of sincerity in the poem as a whole which redeems it from everlasting damnation : but it hangs by a hair over that critical abyss of most just judgment. It is exquisitely wrought in the main, and not utterly hollow or demonstrably insincere : but it is impossible to revert in thought without an inward smile to the adolescent period when despite a certain note of falsity or

[1] *Sordello*, Book the Sixth.

'pathetic fallacy,' too gross to impose even on a boy, it seemed on the whole so genuine a product of sincere and tender inspiration.

No doubt, however, there are more than a few things bequeathed us by Musset for which the advance of time cannot and should not utterly change or chill the fervid imprint of our early admiration. A few of his songs are altogether of the very highest order. Nothing can be truer, sweeter, more blameless in positive and simple completeness of native beauty than such of them as Fortunio's, Barberine's, the Good-bye and again the Good-day to Suzon. All these are perfect honey—*merum mel.* And one other, if one only, has a note in it such as can hardly be found in any song of Tennyson's —the indescribable wonderful note of a natural and irrational fascination like that of a sudden sweet cry from the joyous throat of some strange bird ; I mean of course the song which so haunted Gautier's memory at Venice that the companion of his gondola bade the men go straight

À Saint-Blaise, à la Zuecca,

simply that his ears might no longer be filled and distracted by the perpetual recurrence of the chanted or murmured words ; though others have probably been as much bewildered as was Gautier on his arrival there to conjecture how any couple could ever have gathered vervain or anything else whatever, from any flowery or flowerless fields, at San Biagio in Giudecca. But the song is none the worse for that little practical perplexity. There never were more delicious words in the world ; no truer and clearer note came ever, surely, from

the lips of even any Greek lyrist. It has the very sweetness of Sappho's own—though wanting of course the depth and fervour never wanting to the voice that never was matched on earth.

But if this be nearly all—and I cannot but think that indeed it is nearly all—which can possibly be advanced on behalf of Musset's claim to rank simply as a mere poet above Tennyson, I cannot but also think that few claims can be less tenable. A more difficult choice and a more significant parallel would be that between Mr. Browning and M. Leconte de Lisle. Each of those great writers has something great which is wanting to the other; and on certain points of no small importance they are as far asunder as the poles; and yet it is impossible to overlook the manifold and manifest points of absolute spiritual community between them. One is the latest extant defender of the faith as cast into the iron mould of creeds whom the roll of philosophic poets can display to our admiring astonishment: the other is perhaps the fiercest anti-Christian and anti-Jehovist on all the list of poetic rebels, excepting neither Shelley nor Leopardi; his glorious masterpiece of *Cain*, faultless and sublime throughout the whole long length of its lofty flight as the race of an eagle with the storm-wind, might seem to a devout spirit to have been dictated by actual theophobia (not by any means that kind of fear which has been defined as the beginning of wisdom). And yet, if he were an English Christian, we cannot but think how much liker Mr. Browning he would be than any other poet; and how much liker him than any other Mr. Browning would be, if only he were a French antitheist. Both are more unmistakably

studious, in a deeper and higher than the usual sense, than any living poet of equal rank; both have a turn—though the Englishman has far more than the Frenchman—for strange byways of tragic and grotesque action or passion, occult eccentricities of history and great grim freaks of nature, made worse or better by circumstance and time: no third hand would have written *Un Acte de Charité* or *The Heretic's Tragedy*. Mr. Browning is by far the greater thinker, the keener analyst, the deeper student and the higher master of human science; but M. Leconte de Lisle, at his very highest, is as much the more poetic poet, the more inspired voice, the more lyrical and ardent genius. Much as he knows, he knows much less, no doubt, than Mr. Browning; but unquestionably he can sing much better at his best. On the other hand, though the poet of Hypatia has all requisite command of august and manly pathos no less than of spiritual dignity, he has not a touch of the piercing and overpowering tenderness which glorifies the poet of Pompilia. Setting aside all irrelevant and impertinent question of personal agreement or sympathy with the spirit or the doctrine of either, I should venture to assign the palm to Mr. Browning for depth of pathos and subtlety of knowledge, to M. Leconte de Lisle for height of spirit and sublimity of song. Indeed, after Victor Hugo, he is as much the sublimest as till the appearance of *Rizpah* Mr. Browning was, also of course after Victor Hugo, the most pathetic of contemporary poets.

If the prose work of Musset be excluded from our account, the balance between him and the Laureate would be very much easier to adjust than is the point of precedence between the two poets of more massive

build and more Titanic breed whose giant shadows have here inevitably fallen across my way. But if it be included the question is very much more difficult to settle. The only line of poetry on which, as I think, the superiority of Musset in easy power and exquisite seduction cannot for a moment be disputed, is that of lightly thoughtful and gently graceful verse. I hope and believe that I fully appreciate the charm of such enchanting work as *The Talking Oak* and *Will Waterproof's Lyrical Monologue*: but their grace would lose half its glow, their radiance half its light, if set beside the far brighter and more delicate loveliness of *Une Bonne Fortune* or *À quoi rêvent les jeunes filles*. On all graver and loftier ways of work the palm of power as well as of beauty has been won from the idler if not feebler grasp of the fitfuller and fainter-hearted poet by the more virile as well as the more careful hand of Lord Tennyson. Nor has he—indeed it need hardly be said that he has not—anything to compare for depth and breadth and weight of humour with Lord Tennyson's first and greatest provincial study of the *Northern Farmer*, or even perhaps with the male and female successors of that sublime old pagan, as much less great than he as Hatto and Gorlois were less than Job and Magnus. But Musset without his prose is at best but half himself. And his prose, being either 'of imagination all compact,' or all composed of pure fancy, wit, and qualities all proper if not all necessary to a poet, must in bare justice be considered when we come to cast up the account of his genius. Nor, I presume, will any one assert that the fame of Tennyson could not more easily and more safely dispense with its dramatic acces-

sories or adjuncts than could the fame of Musset. To the French poet, his plays are a most important part and parcel of his necessary credentials at the court of Prince Posterity. Of *Les Marrons du Feu*, and even of *La Coupe et les Lèvres*, most of my coevals, I should conjecture, will agree with me in thinking that much the same must now be said, and remembering that much the same was thought in our salad days, as of *Rolla*, *Namouna*, and all their brilliant fellowship. Their splendid sheet lightning no longer seems more splendid than mere sunlight; the plunging hand-gallop of their verses no longer carries us off at such a joyous and irrational rate of rapture. Perhaps the first stage on the sober way back to some point of critical reason is reached when we come to understand that the profile of Marco in the *Confession* is a truer and more perfect piece of tragic work than all the full-faced portraits of Belcolores and Camargos; that her bloodless hands are more perfectly drawn and far more powerfully terrible than theirs yet quivering with the passion of homicide. We shall then be not far from perception of the truth that the more distinctive and typical proofs of this exquisite poet's most fine and bright intelligence, as contrasted with his pure lyric genius, are to be gathered from his tales and plays in prose; *Fantasio* and *Le Chandelier*, *Mimi Pinson* or *Le Fils du Titien*, so specially precious on account of two sonnets as perfect as verse can be. In both these fields, of comedy and of story, it cannot be denied that his work is equally unequal; the story of *Les Deux Maîtresses* is 'as water unto wine' or water-gruel to champagne if compared with the radiance of Gautier's

early study (*Celle-ci et Celle-là*) on the same moral or fanciful subject; and the least brilliant of his later comedies are almost actually flat. But even to an English audience it would now be surely an impertinence to sing the praises of his more finished comedies and dramatized 'proverbs.' The finest or the most jaded palate that any epicurean in letters might boast or might lament could certainly desire no daintier luxury than these. And though his powers were palpably unequal to the construction or composition, if not indeed to the conception, of a great tragic drama, yet the loyal fervour of Théophile Gautier scarcely carried him too far when he said of the character of Lorenzaccio that it was 'a thoroughly Shakespearean study.' But Shakespeare would have made a play to fit it, as he made one, or modified its materials, to fit his conception of Hamlet. Never elsewhere in any work of Musset's has the impassioned intelligence of his genius given such proof of its active and speculative powers. The central figure of the man whose energies, half palsied by postponement, all vitiated by habit and satiety and weary sensual sloth, have life yet left in them to fret and fever him by fits, and conscience enough behind them to constrain or corrode him to the end, is perhaps but the fuller and darker outline of one sketched or shadowed out by the same hand again and again with a lighter and tenderer touch than here; but the blood-red background of historic action gives it a more tragic relief and dignity. Above all, there is a grandeur which is wanting to all other works of Musset supplied by the central fact that in this man's 'despised and ruinous' life—this 'ruined piece of nature'—the surviving spark of fire, the disin-

fectant grain of salt, is not, as in the wrecked lives of other such actors on the stage of Musset's fancy, mere love or mere desire for success or fame as lover or as poet, as fighter or adventurer, but the uncorrupted grain, the unextinguished fire, of a pure thought and a vital principle; the mission of a deliverer and the motive of a tyrannicide. The utter and flagrant scepticism—the flat and spiritless infidelity—of the poet himself, however visibly revealed and sorrowfully displayed, is powerless to blunt the edge or to quench the ardour of interest inherent in the central idea. No cynicism can deaden it, and no disbelief degrade.

The message or the legacy of Musset to his country and his kind, apart from the manner of its delivery or the grace of its presentation, scarcely seems to me on the whole so precious in itself, or so worthy of a great national poet, that the English flag flying on board the Laureate's ship of song must needs be lowered to salute it at the challenge of M. Taine. If I proceed to inquire, on the other hand, into the positive worth and actual weight of Lord Tennyson's message, taken equally apart from the method of its delivery, it must not and I trust it will not be supposed by any candid reader that I wish to play the odious part of devil's advocate. So much I hope may be premised without fear of self-accusation by dint of self-excuse. And against the most forcible charges of the foreign champion, strong of wrist and skilful of fence as he is, it would not be difficult to bring an answer or to make an appeal on grounds less personal or provincial than I have often seen assumed by the professional admirers of Lord Tennyson. His assailant gave proof that as far as daring is concerned his motto might

be Strafford's word, 'Thorough,' when he struck with the sharp point of his lance 'the spotless shield' which bears inscribed the words *In Memoriam*. His impeachment of Lord Tennyson's great monumental poem as the cold and correct work of a 'perfectly gentlemanlike' mourner, who never can forget to behave himself respectably and carry his grief like a gentleman conscious of spectators, may be classed for perfection of infelicity with Jeffrey's selection of the finest lines in Wordsworth's finest ode for especially contemptuous assault on the simple charge of sheer nonsense. Had he reserved his attack for the pretentiously unpretentious philosophy of the book, we might not so assuredly have felt that his hand had lost its cunning. Lord Tennyson is so ostentatious of his modesty, so unsparing in his reserve, so incessant and obtrusive in his disclaimer of all ambition to rank as a thinker or a teacher, while returning again and yet again to the charge as an ethical apostle or a sentimental theosophist, that we are almost reminded of the philosopher whose vociferous laudation of the dumb, and ear-splitting inculcation of silence, might seem to all half-deafened hearers enough to 'crack his lungs, and split his brazen pipe'—if possibly such a thing might have been possible. I trust it may be held allowable and compatible with loyalty to observe that it is hardly reasonable to touch repeatedly and with obvious earnestness on the gravest and the deepest questions of life and death, of human affection and mortal bereavement—to pour forth page upon page of passionate speculation, of love and fear and hope and doubt and belief, and then to turn round on the student to whose sympathy the book—if there be any reason

whatever for its existence or publication—must surely be supposed to appeal, with the surely astonishing protest that it does not pretend to grapple with the questions on which it harps and the mysteries of which it treats. The fitfulness of a mourner's mood will hardly be held as a sufficient excuse to justify or to reconcile such incompatible incoherences of meditation and profession. To say that these effusions of natural sorrow make no pretence, and would be worthy of contempt if they pretended, to solve or satisfy men's doubts—and then to renew the appearance of an incessant or even a fitful endeavour after some such satisfaction or solution —is surely so incongruous as to sound almost insincere. But the possession of a book so wholly noble and so profoundly beautiful in itself is more precious than the most coherent essay towards the solution of any less insoluble problem. It would be cruel to set over against it for comparison any sample of the bitter or the sweet futilities of Musset, from the date of his *Vœux Stériles* to the date of his not much fruitfuller *Espoir en Dieu.*

Towards the Morte d'Albert, or Idylls of the Prince Consort, I should almost equally regret to seem desirous of playing the aforesaid part of devil's advocate. The most mealy-mouthed critic or the most honey-tongued flatterer of Lord Tennyson cannot pretend or profess a more cordial and thankful admiration than I have always felt for the exquisite magnificence of style, the splendid flashes of episodical illumination, with which those poems are vivified or adorned. But when they are presented to us as a great moral and poetic whole, the flower at once of all epics and all ethics—

Cette promotion me laisse un peu rêveur.

I do not think much of Alfred de Musset as a shepherd of souls or a moral philosopher: but I should feel very sincere pity for a generation which felt itself obliged to fall back upon the alternative ideal here proposed to it by Alfred Tennyson. A writer in a contemporary review dropped once an observation on this matter which struck me as so scientifically remarkable that I made a note of it for possible future service. A more patient or methodical man would have transcribed the passage at length; but the gist of it I believe that I set down correctly enough for any needful purpose. It was to this impressive and instructive effect: that is to say, that certain pitiful weaklings of no specified kind, who find themselves in the surely very pitiable condition of aspirants after an impossible experience of passions and emotions which real men possess, and begin by subduing, but from which these unclassified unfortunates are shut out by congenital imperfection or deficiency in fullness of nature, have wilfully and maliciously impeached the master-work of Lord Tennyson on the charge—of all charges upon earth—that its moral tone was over highly pitched. We live and learn in this world: there never was a truer saying. But I should myself, I must needs confess, as soon have expected to hear that the Memoirs of Casanova or the *Adventures of Faublas* had ever been attacked on the score of too exalted a morality. Among all poems of serious pretentions in that line, it had appeared to the infirmity of my judgment that this latest epic of King Arthur took the very lowest view of virtue, set up the very poorest and most pitiful standard of duty or of heroism for woman or for man. To abstain from talking scandal or listening to it is a

moral principle which I sincerely wish were more practically popular than it is: and ever since the first edition of *The Princess*, wherein there shot up a long eruption of blazing eloquence, extinguished or suppressed in later issues of the poem, on that sin of 'narrowest neighbourhoods—where gossip breeds and seethes and festers in provincial sloth,' Lord Tennyson has missed few opportunities of denouncing it with emphatic if not virulent iteration. But the lesson of abstinence from promiscuous tattle can hardly be considered by itself as 'the law and the gospel.' And whatever else there is of sound doctrine in Lord Tennyson's *Idylls* was preached more simply and not less earnestly in the grand old compilation of Sir Thomas Mallory. But, says the Laureate, it is not Mallory's King Arthur, nor yet Geoffrey's King Arthur, that I have desired to reproduce: on the contrary, it is 'scarce other than' Prince Albert. And in that case, of course, there is no more room for discussion. All I can say is that most assuredly I never heard 'these Idylls' attacked on any moral ground but this: that the tone of divine or human doctrine preached and of womanly or manly character exalted in them, directly or indirectly, was poor, mean, paltry, petty, almost base; so utterly insufficient as to be little short of ignoble: that it is anything but a sign of moral elevation to be so constantly preoccupied by speculations on possible contact with 'smut' and contamination from 'swine': that Byron for one and Musset for another have been violently reviled and virtuously condemned on the charge of handling subjects very much less offensive than the stimulation and seduction of torpid and reluc-

tant senility by the cajoleries and caresses of a lissom Vivien: that the tone of the original 'eleventh book,' once 'picked from the fire,' and now most incongruously incorporated with an incompatible mass of new matter, was incomparably higher, finer, manlier, than the Albertine ideal of later days. There the great dying king had been made to say, in words which 'give a very echo to the seat' where conscience is enthroned,

> I have lived my life, and that which I have done
> May He within himself make pure!

If this be taken as the last natural expression of a gallant, honest, kindly, faulty creature like the hero of old Mallory, it strikes home at once to a man's heart. If it be taken as the last deliberate snuffle of 'the blameless king,' it strikes us in a different fashion. We feel that even at Almesbury, when denouncing the fallen Guinevere in such magnificent language that the reader is content and indeed thankful to take the manliness and propriety of such an address for granted, this blameless being had not attained to the very perfection of pretence—a flight beyond his preceding pretence of perfection.

The real and radical flaw in the splendid structure of the *Idylls* is not to be found either in the antiquity of the fabulous groundwork or in the modern touches which certainly were not needed, and if needed would not have been adequate, to redeem any worthy recast of so noble an original from the charge of nothingness. The fallacy which obtrudes itself throughout, the false note which incessantly jars on the mind's ear, results from the incongruity of materials which are radically

incapable of combination or coherence. Between the various Arthurs of different national legends there is little more in common than the name. It is essentially impossible to construct a human figure by the process of selection from the incompatible types of irreconcilable ideals. All that the utmost ingenuity of eclecticism can do has been demonstrated by Lord Tennyson in his elaborate endeavour after the perfection of this process; and the result is to impress upon us a complete and irreversible conviction of its absolute hopelessness. Had a poet determined to realize the Horatian ideal of artistic monstrosity, he could hardly have set about it more ingeniously than by copying one feature from the Mabinogion and the next from the Morte d'Arthur. So far from giving us 'Geoffrey's' type or 'Mallory's' type, he can hardly be said to have given us a recognizable likeness of Prince Albert; who, if neither a wholly gigantic nor altogether a divine personage, was at least, one would imagine, a human figure. But the spectre of his laureate's own ideal knight, neither Welsh nor French, but a compound of 'Guallia and Gaul, soul-curer and body-curer,' sir priest and sir knight, Mallory and Geoffrey, old style and middle style and new style, makes the reader bethink himself what might or might not be the result if some poet of similar aim and aspiration were to handle the tale of Troy, for instance, as Lord Tennyson has handled the Arthurian romance. The half godlike Achilles of Homer is one in name and nothing else with the all brutish Achilles of Shakespeare; the romantic Arthur of the various volumes condensed by Mallory into his English compilation—incoherent itself

and incongruous in its earlier parts, but so nobly consistent, so profoundly harmonious in its close—has hardly more in common with the half impalpable hero of British myth or tradition. And I cannot but think that no very promising task would be undertaken by a poet who should set before himself the design of harmonizing in one fancy portrait, of reconciling in one typic figure, the features of Achilles as they appear in the Iliad with the features of Achilles as they appear in *Troilus and Cressida.*

I cannot say that Lord Tennyson's lifelong tone about women and their shortcomings has ever commended itself to my poor mind as the note of a very pure or high one. There is always a latent if not a patent propensity in many of his very lovers to scold and whine after a fashion which makes even Alfred de Musset seem by comparison a model or a type of manliness. His Enids and Edith Aylmers are much below the ideal mark of Wordsworth, who has never, I believe, been considered a specially great master in that kind: but his 'little Letties' were apparently made mean and thin of nature to match their pitifully poor-spirited suitors. It cannot respectfully be supposed that Lord Tennyson is unaware of the paltry currishness and mean-spirited malice displayed in verse too dainty for such base uses by the plaintively spiteful manikins, with the thinnest whey of sour milk in their poor fretful veins, whom he brings forward to vent upon some fickle or too discerning mistress the vain and languid venom of their contemptible contempt. But why on earth a man of high genius and high spirit, a poet and a patriot, should be so fond of harping on such an

untuneful string as this, is a question which will always vex the souls and discomfit the sympathies of his readers. And some of these will perhaps consider it a just retribution for this habit, and others perhaps as a different symptom of the same infirmity, that with all his elaborate graces of language he should never once have come within a thousand leagues of the pure and perfect grace, unfettered and unforced, which even in the doleful days of his decadence the better genius of Musset could infuse into the laughingly tender undertone of his adorably delicate and magically musical verses improvised for a young lady in a hood like a monk's cowl. It would be too cruel to bid any reader set these for comparison beside such things as the *Wrens* or the *Ringlet* of Lord Tennyson in evidence how exquisitely good or bad such fanciful effusions at their worst or at their best may be.

I have just touched in passing on a point in which the incomparable superiority of the English poet is not more evident than it is infinite. But, with all due admiration for the genuine patriotism of his 'ballad of the fleet' and *Defence of Lucknow*, I must be permitted to observe that his general tone of thought and utterance on large questions of contemporary national history is such as might with admirable propriety find such expression as it finds at the close of *The Princess* from the lips, not even of 'the Tory member,' but of the Tory member's undergraduate son—supposing that young gentleman to be other for the nonce than a socialist. There is a strain, so to speak, as of beardless bluster about it, which could by no possible ingenuity have been so rendered as to suggest a more appropriate

mouthpiece. It has the shrill unmistakable accent, not of a provincial deputy, but of a provincial schoolboy. And this fact, it would seem, was revealed to Lord Tennyson himself, of all men on earth, by some freak of the same humorous if malicious fairy who disclosed to him the not less amusing truth, and induced him to publish it, with a face of unmoved gravity, to the nation and the world, that whenever he said 'King Arthur' he meant Prince Albert. No satirist could have ventured on either stroke of sarcasm. So it was from the beginning (1830), so it is, and so it will be, for all momentary protest or incongruous pretence to the contrary. In a sonnet addressed to Victor Hugo, Lord Tennyson, with rather singular and rather more than questionable taste, informed the master poet of his age that he was said not to love England. No doubt, as I have elsewhere found occasion to remark, he did not love England as he loved his mother France and his foster-mother Spain; and against certain phases of modern English policy, as against certain shades of modern English character, Hugo did undoubtedly think fit once and again to utter a frank and friendly word of protest. But such a tone as Lord Tennyson's almost invariable tone towards France is simply inconceivable as coming from Victor Hugo with reference to any great nation in the world. Now this sort of strident anti-Gallican cackle was all very well, if even then it was not very wise, in the days of Nelson. But in our piping times of peace it is purely ludicrous to hear a martial shepherd of idyllic habits thus chirping defiance and fluting disparagement of the world beyond his sheep-cote. Besides the two fine sonnets of his youth and his age

on Poland and Montenegro, he has uttered little if anything on public matters that I can remember as worth remembering except the two spirited and stalwart songs of 'Hands all round' and 'Britons, guard your own,' which rang out a manful response of disgust and horror at the news of a crime unequalled in the cowardly vileness of its complicated atrocity since the model massacre of St. Bartholomew. Not as yet had the blameless Albert—under the spell of a Palmerstonian Merlin?—led forth—we will not say his Guinevere—to clasp the thievish hand of a then uncrowned assassin. If Lord Tennyson has no personal or official reason for wishing to suppress the record and stifle the recollection of work which in every sense does him honour, some of us may venture to think that these verses would better bear reprinting than many which are allowed to keep their place on his list. As it is, he can hardly wonder if they should be 'mercilessly pirated.'

On the crowning question of metre much might be said on both sides in praise and in dispraise of Musset and of Tennyson alike. At the best of their good work, the world can show no sweeter musicians of truer touch on the keys of language than are they. At their worst, the world as certainly can show none worse. The rocks on which either vessel is ever likely to split lie in exactly opposite directions. The Englishman is too hard to satisfy: the Frenchman was too easily pleased. Musset, I should venture to guess, was born with a decidedly finer ear than Tennyson's; but, as a punster might express himself, he let that ear run hopelessly to seed, and ultimately left it to rot out of sheer indolence. Coleridge, on the other hand, very greatly understated

the case in saying that he could hardly scan some of the Laureate's earlier verses. There are whole poems of Lord Tennyson's first period which are no more properly to be called metrical than the more shapeless and monstrous parts of Walt Whitman; which are lineally derived as to their form—if form that can be called where form is none—from the vilest example set by Cowley, when English verse was first infected and convulsed by the detestable duncery of sham Pindarics. At times, of course, his song was then as sweet as ever it has sounded since; but he could never make sure of singing right for more than a few minutes or stanzas. The strenuous drill through which since then he has felt it necessary to put himself has done all that hard labour can do to rectify this congenital complaint: by dint of stocks and backboard he has taught himself a more graceful and upright carriage. For the shambling rhyme and the flaccid facility of Musset's verse at its weakest, he too evidently had not self-respect enough, nor care enough for the duties of his art, to go through a similar process of laborious cure. So much the lower is his rank, and so much the worse it is for his memory. That it would be well worth Lord Tennyson's while to make his yet girlish Muse undergo this physical course of discipline must from the first have been obvious to all who could appreciate the heavenly beauty of her higher early notes. He never has written anything of more potent perfection, of more haunting and overpowering charm, than the divine lament of which the central note is a gentler echo[1] to the Duchess of Malfi's exceeding bitter cry:—

[1] A most unlucky sycophant of the Laureate's was once pleased to

O that it were possible we might
But hold some two days' conference with the dead!
From them I should learn something I am sure
I never shall learn here.

Even with the sound of Webster's more intense and passionate verse rekindled in the ear of our memory, we can take softer pleasure in the tender note of Lord Tennyson's.

It may not be the highest imaginable sign of poetic power or native inspiration that a man should be able to grind a beauty out of a deformity or carve a defect into a perfection; but whatever may be the comparative worth of this peculiar faculty, no poet surely ever had it in a higher degree or cultivated it with more patient and strenuous industry than Lord Tennyson. Idler men, or men less qualified and disposed to expend such length of time and energy of patience on the composition and modification, the rearrangement and recision and reissue, of a single verse or copy of verses, can only look on at such a course of labour with amused or admiring astonishment, and a certain doubt whether the linnets, to whose method of singing Lord Tennyson compares his own, do really go through the training of such a musical gymnasium before they come forth qualified to sing. But for one thing, and that a thing of

observe, with unquestionable accuracy, that it is ridiculous to infer the fact of imitation or reminiscence from the fact that Lord Tennyson's poem happens to begin with the same four or five words as the speech of Webster's heroine. Whence it would appear that the ardent admirer of a well-known poem, and the gratuitous champion of its author against a perfectly inoffensive charge of conscious or unconscious recollection or derivation from a famous passage in the master-work of a mightier predecessor, may never have read as far as the fifteenth line of the poem in question.

great price, this hard-working poet had never any need to work hard. Whatever the early imperfection of his ear, no man was ever born with a truer and more perfect eye. During fifty years he has never given us a book without unquestionable evidence of this. Among his many claims and credentials as a poet, there is none more unimpeachable or more clear. Nor can any kind of study be more helpful or delightful to the naturally elect student of poetry than that which traces through the work of any poet the vein of colour or of sentiment derived from his earliest or deepest impressions of nature. Because the earliest are usually the deepest of these, it would be a false conclusion—hateful as an unfilled can—to infer that they must be so always. By far the strongest and most significant impressions of 'naked nature'—of sea and shore, and stars and winds, and all forces and all features of all these—that we find engraved upon the page and engrained into the imagination of Victor Hugo, may be dated from the dawn of his fifty-first year—the first of eighteen patient and indignant years of dauntless and glorious exile. The splendours and the terrors, the rapture and the rage, the passion and the subtlety of the most dangerous of all seas known to seamen, and surely the loveliest as well as the deadliest of them all, passed all into 'the thunder and the sunshine' of his verse, and made of the greatest living poet a tenfold greater poet than ever he had been before. So that those who believe all heaven and all earth, all evil and all good, to exist only or mainly for the sake of the singer and the songs he may make of them, are bound to suppose that the great first cause and ultimate reason or pretext for the exist-

ence of Napoleon III. was the necessity that occasion should be given and means supplied for the production and the perfection of the greatest work possible to the godlike hand of Victor Hugo. And certainly some such excuse or apology would appear to be required by the conscience of humanity from a conscious and rational First Cause.

The influence and impression of outward and visible nature on the spirit and the work of Tennyson may not less confidently be inferred from comparison of his studies after the life with the life itself of the nature to which he was a native. Many years ago, as I have always remembered, on the appearance of the first four *Idylls of the King*, one of the greatest painters now living pointed out to me, with a brief word of rapturous admiration, the wonderful breadth of beauty and the perfect force of truth in a single verse of *Elaine*—

> And white sails flying on the yellow sea.

I could not but feel conscious at once of its charm, and of the equally certain fact that I, though cradled and reared beside the sea, had never seen anything like that. But on the first bright day I ever spent on the eastern coast of England I saw the truth of this touch at once, and recognized once more with admiring delight the subtle and sure fidelity of that happy and studious hand. There, on the dull yellow foamless floor of dense discoloured sea, so thick with clotted sand that the water looked massive and solid as the shore, the white sails flashed whiter against it and along it as they fled: and I knew once more the truth of what I never had doubted—that the eye and the hand of Tennyson may

always be trusted, at once and alike, to see and to express the truth. But he must have learnt the more splendid lesson of the terrors and the glories of the Channel before he caught the finest image ever given in his verse—the likeness of a wave 'green-glimmering from its summit—

'with all
Its stormy crests that smoke against the skies.'

Assuredly there will be found no touch like that in all the work of Musset. It has all the faithful subtlety of Shelley's, and all the heavenly majesty of Milton's. Only Victor Hugo himself can make words lighten and thunder like these.

It will be seen that in these notes I have neither pretended nor attempted to give an exhaustive estimate of two typical and rival poets. Much of the most important and significant work of either has been perforce passed by, which we may hope that the critical historian of the future will properly take into account. All that a student in our own time can do or can desire is merely to cast into the present scales of judgment the weight of a grain in passing: he can give no more and must wish to give no less as his contribution to the verdict than a candid expression of the reasons for his loyal opinion of the case.

EMILY BRONTË.

To the England of our own time, it has often enough been remarked, the novel is what the drama was to the England of Shakespeare's. The same general interest produces the same incessant demand for the same inexhaustible supply of imaginative produce, in a shape more suited to the genius of a later day and the conditions of a changed society. Assuming this simple explanation to be sufficient for the obvious fact that in the modern world of English letters the novel is everywhere and the drama is nowhere, we may remark one radical point of difference between the taste of playgoers in the age of Shakespeare and the taste of novel-readers in our own. Tragedy was then at least as popular as either romantic or realistic comedy; whereas nothing would seem to be more unpopular with the run of modern readers than the threatening shadow of tragedy projected across the whole length of a story, inevitable and unmistakable from the lurid harshness of its dawn to the fiery softness of its sunset. The objection to a novel in which the tragic element has an air of incongruity and caprice—in which a tragic surprise is, as it were, sprung upon the reader, with a jarring shock such as might be given by the actual news of some un-

foreseen and grievous accident—this objection seems to me thoroughly reasonable, grounded on a true critical sense of fitness and unfitness; but the distaste for high and pure tragedy, where the close is in perfect and simple harmony with the opening, seems not less thoroughly pitiable and irrational.

A later work of indisputable power, in which the freshness of humour is as real and vital as the fervour of passion, was at once on its appearance compared with Emily Brontë's now famous story. And certainly not without good cause; for in point of local colour *Mehalah* is, as far as I know, the one other book which can bear and may challenge the comparison. Its pages, for one thing, reflect the sterile glitter and desolate fascination of the salt marshes, their minute splendours and barren beauties and multitudinous monotony of measureless expanse, with the same instinctive and unlaborious accuracy which brings all the moorland before us in a breath when we open any chapter of *Wuthering Heights*. But the accumulated horrors of the close, however possible in fact, are wanting in the one quality which justifies and ennobles all admissible horror in fiction: they hardly seem inevitable; they lack the impression of logical and moral certitude. All the realism in the world will not suffice to convey this impression: and a work of art which wants it wants the one final and irreplaceable requisite of inner harmony. Now in *Wuthering Heights* this one thing needful is as perfectly and triumphantly attained as in *King Lear* or *The Duchess of Malfy*, in *The Bride of Lammermoor* or *Notre-Dame de Paris*. From the first we breathe the fresh dark air of tragic passion and presage; and to the

last the changing wind and flying sunlight are in keeping with the stormy promise of the dawn. There is no monotony, there is no repetition, but there is no discord. This is the first and last necessity, the foundation of all labour and the crown of all success, for a poem worthy of the name; and this it is that distinguishes the hand of Emily from the hand of Charlotte Brontë. All the works of the elder sister are rich in poetic spirit, poetic feeling, and poetic detail; but the younger sister's work is essentially and definitely a poem in the fullest and most positive sense of the term. It was therefore all the more proper that the honour of raising a biographical and critical monument to the author of *Wuthering Heights* should have been reserved for a poetess of the next generation to her own. And those who had already in their mind's eye the clearest and most definite conception of Emily Brontë will be the readiest to acknowledge their obligation and express their gratitude to Miss Robinson for the additional light which she has been enabled to throw upon a great and singular character. It is true that when all has been said the main features of that character stand out before us unchanged. The sweet and noble genius of Mrs. Gaskell did not enable her to see far into so strange and sublime a problem; but, after all, the main difference between the biographer of Emily and the biographer of Charlotte is that Miss Robinson has been interested and attracted where Mrs. Gaskell was scared and perplexed. On one point, however, the new light afforded us is of the very utmost value and interest. We all knew how great was Emily Brontë's tenderness for the lower animals; we find, with surprise as well as admiration,

that the range of this charity was so vast as to include even her own miserable brother. Of that lamentable and contemptible caitiff—contemptible not so much for his commonplace debauchery as for his abject selfishness, his lying pretention, and his nerveless cowardice—there is far too much in this memoir: it is inconceivable how any one can have put into a lady's hand such a letter as one which defaces two pages of the volume, and it may be permissible to regret that a lady should have made it public; but this error is almost atoned for by the revelation that of all the three sisters in that silent home 'it was the silent Emily who had ever a cheering word for Branwell; it was Emily who still remembered that he was her brother, without that remembrance freezing her heart to numbness.' That she saved his life from fire, and hid from their father the knowledge of her heroism, no one who knows anything of Emily Brontë will learn with any mixture of surprise in his sense of admiration; but it gives a new tone and colour to our sympathetic and reverent regard for her noble memory when we find in the depth of that self-reliant and stoic nature a fountain so inexhaustible of such Christlike longsuffering and compassion.

I cannot however but think that Miss Robinson makes a little too much of the influence exercised on Emily Brontë's work by the bitter, narrow, and ignoble misery of the life which she had watched burn down into such pitiful ruin that its memory is hardly redeemed by the last strange and inconsistent flash of expiring manhood which forbids us to regard with unmixed contempt the sufferer who had resolution enough to die standing if he had lived prostrate, and so make at

the very last a manful end of an abject history. The impression of this miserable experience is visible only in Anne Brontë's second work, *The Tenant of Wildfell Hall*; which deserves perhaps a little more notice and recognition than it has ever received. It is ludicrously weak, palpably unreal, and apparently imitative, whenever it reminds the reader that it was written by a sister of Charlotte and Emily Brontë; but as a study of utterly flaccid and invertebrate immorality it bears signs of more faithful transcription from life than anything in *Jane Eyre* or *Wuthering Heights*. On the other hand, the intelligent reader of *Wuthering Heights* cannot fail to recognize that what he is reading is a tragedy simply because it is the work of a writer whose genius is essentially tragic. Those who believe that Heathcliff was called into existence by the accident that his creator had witnessed the agonies of a violent weakling in love and in disgrace might believe that Shakespeare wrote *King Lear* because he had witnessed the bad effects of parental indulgence, and that Æschylus wrote the *Eumenides* because he had witnessed the uncomfortable results of matricide. The book is what it is because the author was what she was; this is the main and central fact to be remembered. Circumstances have modified the details; they have not implanted the conception. If there were any need for explanation there would be no room for apology. As it is, the few faults of design or execution leap to sight at a first glance, and vanish in the final effect and unimpaired impression of the whole; while those who object to the violent illegalities of conduct with regard to real or personal property on which the progress of

the story does undeniably depend—'a senseless piece of glaring folly,' it was once called by some critic learned in the law—might as well complain, in Carlylesque phrase, that the manners are quite other than Belgravian.

It is a fine and accurate instinct that has inevitably led Miss Robinson to cite in chosen illustration of the book's quality at its highest those two incomparable pictures of dreamland and delirium which no poet that ever lived has ever surpassed for passionate and lifelike beauty of imaginative truth. But it is even somewhat less than exact to say that the latter scene 'is given with a masterly pathos that Webster need not have made more strong, nor Fletcher more lovely and appealing.' Fletcher could not have made it as lovely and appealing as it is; he would have made it exquisitely pretty and effectively theatrical; but the depth, the force, the sincerity, recalling here so vividly the 'several forms of distraction' through which Webster's Cornelia passes after the murder of her son by his brother, excel everything else of the kind in imaginative art; not excepting, if truth may be spoken on such a subject, the madness of Ophelia or even of Madge Wildfire. It is hardly ever safe to say dogmatically what can or cannot be done by the rarest and highest genius; yet it must surely be borne in upon us all that these two crowning passages could never have been written by any one to whom the motherhood of earth was less than the brotherhood of man—to whom the anguish, the intolerable and mortal yearning, of insatiate and insuppressible homesickness, was less than the bitterest of all other sufferings endurable or con-

ceivable in youth. But in Emily Brontë this passion was twin-born with the passion for truth and rectitude. The stale and futile epithet of Titaness has in this instance a deeper meaning than appears ; her goddess mother was in both senses the same who gave birth to the divine martyr of Æschylean legend : Earth under one aspect and one name, but under the other Righteousness. And therefore was the first and last word uttered out of the depth of her nature a cry for that one thing needful without which all virtue is as worthless as all pleasure is vile, all hope as shameful as all faith is abject—a cry for liberty.

And therefore too, perhaps we may say, it is that any seeming confusion or incoherence in her work is merely external and accidental, not inward and spiritual. Belief in the personal or positive immortality of the individual and indivisible spirit was not apparently, in her case, swallowed up or nullified or made nebulous by any doctrine or dream of simple reabsorption into some indefinite infinity of eternal life. So at least it seems to me that her last ardent confession of dauntless and triumphant faith should properly be read, however capable certain phrases in it may seem of the vaguer and more impersonal interpretation. For surely no scornfuller or stronger comment on the 'unutterable' vanity of creeds could pass more naturally into a chant expressive of more profound and potent faith ; a song of spiritual trust more grave and deep and passionate in the solemn ardour of its appeal than the Hymn to God of Cleanthes. Her infrangible self-reliance and lonely sublimity of spirit she had in common with him and his fellows of the Porch ; it was much more than 'some shy ostrich

prompting' which bade her assign to an old Stoic the most personal and characteristic utterance in all her previous poems ; but the double current of imaginative passion and practical compassion which made her a tragic poet and proved her a perfect woman gives as it were a living warmth and sweetness to her memory, such as might well have seemed incompatible with that sterner and colder veneration so long reserved for her spiritual kinsmen of the past. As a woman we never knew her so well as now that we have to welcome this worthy record of her life, with deeper thanks and warmer congratulations to the writer than can often be due even to the best of biographers and critics. As an author she has not perhaps even yet received her full due or taken her final place. Again and again has the same obvious objection been taken to that awkwardness of construction or presentation which no reader of *Wuthering Heights* can undertake to deny. But, to judge by the vigour with which this objection is urged, it might be supposed that the rules of narrative observed by all great novelists were of an almost legal or logical strictness and exactitude with regard to probability of detail. Now most assuredly the indirect method of relation through which the story of Heathcliff is conveyed, however unlikely or clumsy it may seem from the realistic point of view, does not make this narrative more liable to the charge of actual impossibility than others of the kind. Defoe still remains the one writer of narrative in the first person who has always kept the stringent law of possibilities before the eye of his invention. Even the admirable ingenuity and the singular painstaking which distinguish the method of Mr. Wilkie

Collins can only give external and transient plausibility to the record of long conversations overheard or shared in by the narrator only a few hours before the supposed date of the report drawn up from memory. The very greatest masters in their kind, Walter Scott and Charles Dickens, are of all narrators the most superbly regardless of this objection. From *Rob Roy* and *Redgauntlet*, from *David Copperfield* and *Bleak House*, we might select at almost any stage of the autobiographic record some instance of detail in which the violation of plausibility, probability, or even possibility, is at least as daring and as glaring as any to be found in the narrative of Nelly Dean. Even when that narrative is removed, so to speak, yet one degree further back—even when we are supposed to be reading a minute detail of incident and dialogue transcribed by the hand of the lay figure Mr. Lockwood from Nelly Dean's report of the account conveyed to her years ago by Heathcliff's fugitive wife or gadding servant, each invested for the nonce with the peculiar force and distinctive style of the author—even then we are not asked to put such an overwhelming strain on our faculty of imaginative belief as is exacted by the great writer who invites us to accept the report drawn up by Mr. Pendennis of everything that takes place—down even to the minutest points of dialogue, accent, and gesture—in the household of the Newcomes or the Firmins during the absence no less than in the presence of their friend the reporter. Yet all this we gladly and gratefully admit, without demur or cavil, to be thoroughly authentic and credible, because the whole matter of the report, however we get at it, is found when we do get at it to be vivid and lifelike as an actual ex-

perience of living fact. Here, if ever anywhere, the attainment of the end justifies the employment of the means. If we are to enjoy imaginative work at all, we must 'assume the virtue' of imagination, even if we have it not; we must, as children say, 'pretend' or make believe a little as a very condition of the game.

A graver and perhaps a somewhat more plausible charge is brought against the author of *Wuthering Heights* by those who find here and there in her book the savage note or the sickly symptom of a morbid ferocity. Twice or thrice especially the details of deliberate or passionate brutality in Heathcliff's treatment of his victims make the reader feel for a moment as though he were reading a police report or even a novel by some French 'naturalist' of the latest and brutallest order. But the pervading atmosphere of the book is so high and healthy that the effect even of those 'vivid and fearful scenes' which impaired the rest of Charlotte Brontë is almost at once neutralized—we may hardly say softened, but sweetened, dispersed, and transfigured—by the general impression of noble purity and passionate straightforwardness, which removes it at once and for ever from any such ugly possibility of association or comparison. The whole work is not more incomparable in the effect of its atmosphere or landscape than in the peculiar note of its wild and bitter pathos; but most of all is it unique in the special and distinctive character of its passion. The love which devours life itself, which devastates the present and desolates the future with unquenchable and raging fire, has nothing less pure in it than flame or sunlight. And this passionate and ardent chastity is utterly and unmistakably spontaneous and

unconscious. Not till the story is ended, not till the effect of it has been thoroughly absorbed and digested, does the reader even perceive the simple and natural absence of any grosser element, any hint or suggestion of a baser alloy in the ingredients of its human emotion than in the splendour of lightning or the roll of a gathered wave. Then, as on issuing sometimes from the tumult of charging waters, he finds with something of wonder how absolutely pure and sweet was the element of living storm with which his own nature has been for awhile made one; not a grain in it of soiling sand, not a waif of clogging weed. As was the author's life, so is her book in all things: troubled and taintless, with little of rest in it, and nothing of reproach. It may be true that not many will ever take it to their hearts; it is certain that those who do like it will like nothing very much better in the whole world of poetry or prose.

CHARLES READE.

To a country and a century in which the higher form of drama has been supplanted and superseded by the higher form of novel, the loss of an energetic and able craftsman in the trade of narrative fiction must naturally seem more or less considerable. The brilliant industry of Mr. Charles Reade, his vivid and vehement force of style, his passionate belief and ardent delight in the greatness of his calling, would have conferred a certain kind of interest on a literary figure of less serious pretentions to regard. It is not at all wonderful that on the morrow of his death there should have arisen in the little world of letters a little noise of debate as to the proper station and definition of so remarkable a writer. Whether he was or was not a man of genius—whether his genius, if he had such a thing, was wide or narrow, deep or shallow, complete or incomplete—became at once, for the moment, a matter in some quarters of something like personal controversy. If he had often written as well as he could sometimes write—or, again, if he had often written as ill as he could sometimes write—there would be no possibility of dispute on the subject. He has left not a few pages which if they do not live as long as the English language will fail to do so through no fault of their own, but solely through the

malice of accident, by which so many reputations well worthy of a longer life have been casually submerged or eclipsed.

On the other hand, he has taken good care that few of his larger and more laboured works shall have so much as a fair chance for their lives. No man was ever at more pains to impair his own prospects of literary survival. His first two stories were the very quintessence of theatrical ability—and were now and then something more. But if some of his best effects were due to his experience as a dramatic aspirant, not a few of his more glaring faults as a novelist are traceable to the same source. The burlesque duel in *Christie Johnstone*, the preposterous incident of the living portrait in *Peg Woffington*, might have made the fortune of a couple of farces; but in serious fiction they are such blemishes as cannot be effaced and can hardly be redeemed by the charming scenes which precede or follow them—the rescue of the drowning dauber by his discarded bride, and the charity of the triumphant actress to the household of the stage-struck poetaster. These are small matters: but there are errors of the same stamp in the more important works of the maturer novelist.

Take the first book which gave a wide echo to his name—that which bears the awkward label, *It is never too late to mend*. One of the most important and indispensable figures in the story might have done well enough on the boards of a theatre, but does very much less than well between the boards of a novel. 'Levi the Jew' has been unjustly, I think, dismissed as an elaborate and absolute failure: he has at all events more vitality and verisimilitude than 'the gentle Jew' of *Our*

Mutual Friend, or the Messianic Jew of *Daniel Deronda*, or even the less unimaginable Israelite of *La Femme de Claude*: the remnants of the chosen people seem seldom to bring their admiring students a stroke of good luck in the line of sentimental or enthusiastic fiction: but it is when set beside or between such living and complete figures as George Fielding and Tom Robinson that the grateful and vindictive Hebrew appears out of his place by day, so far from the footlights behind which he could be seen in due relief and measured by the proper standard.

A far more absolute failure is the athletico-seraphic chaplain—Prince Rodolphe (of the *Mystères de Paris*) in Anglican orders, and much astonished to find himself translated into a latitude less congenial than the slums of the Seine riverside. For all Mr. Reade's loud and loyal acclamation of Dumas, he had really more in common with the author of *La Salamandre* than with the author of *La Reine Margot*; though his place as a writer is more decidedly above that of Sue than below that of Dumas. But for anything like a parallel to the interminably disgusting reiteration of diabolical and bestial cruelties by which a third part of his best-known book is overloaded and deformed, we should have to look further back—or further forward—in the record of French fiction than the date of Eugène Sue. That in this case the hideous and nauseous narrative is unmistakably inspired by no baser instinct than a pure and genuine loathing of cruelty is more than enough to exculpate the man, but by no means enough to exculpate the artist.

It is equally impossible not to recognize and not to

respect the practical proof thus given that Charles Reade, as a lover of justice and mercy, a hater of atrocity and foul play, may claim a place in the noble army of which Voltaire was in the last century, as Hugo is in this, the indefatigable and lifelong leader; the great company of witnesses, by right of articulate genius and might of intelligent appeal, against all tenets and all theories of sophists and of saints which tend directly or indirectly to pamper or to stimulate, to fortify or to excuse, the tyrannous instinct or appetite for cruelty innate and latent alike in peoples of every race and every creed. To justify the ways of kings to men by comparison with 'the doings of the gods, which are cruel, though not that alone,' was a fashionable form of political or social sophistry which to no Englishman of his own or of any time could have seemed more despicable and detestable than to Reade. But the injury inflicted on his first elaborate or important work of fiction by the intrusion of the huge and horrible episode which encumbers and defaces it is a sign of instinct so inferior or of skill so imperfect as to make any comparison of his art with the art of Voltaire only less absurd than would be a comparison of his genius with the genius of Hugo.

There is not, however, in all the range of his work, another as flagrant instance of passionate philanthropy riding roughshod over the ruins of artistic propriety. In *Hard Cash* the crusade against the villainous lunacy of the law regarding lunatics was conducted with more literary tact and skill—with nobler energy and ardour it could not be conducted—than this previous onslaught on the system which made homicide by torture a

practical part of such prison discipline as well deserved the disgrace of approbation from the magnanimous worshipper of portable gallows and beneficent whip: the harsher and the humaner agents of an insane law who figure on the stage of the narrative which attacks it are more lifelike as well as less horrible than the infernal little disciples of Carlyle who infest and impede the progress of the earlier tale.

In the brilliant story of *A Simpleton* there are passages of almost as superfluous dullness as the dullest superfluities of the self-styled naturalist whose horrors Mr. Reade undertook to adapt for presentation on the English stage: and the dullness is of the same order as M. Zola's: it is deliberate and systematic, based on the French realist's great principle, that a study from life should be founded on what he calls 'documents'—nay, that it should be made up of these, were they never so noisome or so wearisome: but the second half of the book redeems and rectifies the tedious excesses and excursions of the first.

In the power of realizing and vivifying what he could only have known by research or by report, Reade is second only to Defoe; while in liveliness and fluency of narrative he is generally as superior alike to Defoe and to Balzac as he is inferior to the one in depth and grasp of intellect, to the other in simplicity and purity of self-forgetting and self-effacing imagination. His African and Australian episodes are worthy of Dumas, when the king of storytellers was at his very best: the leading figures in these are more vivid and more actual than Edmond Dantès; their adventures not less delightful to follow, and easier to digest than his. When

the rush of narrative carries the narrator as fairly and smoothly forward as a swimmer with wind and tide to back him—when he is too full of his work, and too much absorbed by the enjoyment of it, to pause for a passing indulgence in any personal tricks of posturing or byplay of controversial commentary—no reader could desire a keener or a healthier pleasure than this admirable master of his craft will repeatedly afford. Nevertheless, upon the whole, it may be questioned whether Reade is to be placed on a level with Dumas. Dumas, in the slightest and loosest work of his vainest mood or his idlest moment, is at least unaffected and unpretentious: the most fervent disciple of Reade will scarcely claim for his master the credit of these excellent qualities. In Dumas the novelist and the dramatist were thoroughly at one; the qualities of each were wholly and impartially serviceable to the other: *Antony* and *Angèle* were not hindrances but helps to the author of *Olympe de Clèves* and *La Dame de Monsoreau*. In Reade the properties and functions of the playwright were much less thoroughly fused and harmonized with the properties and functions of the narrator. The work of Dumas as a novelist is never the worse and sometimes the better for his experience of the stage: that of Reade is sometimes the better and sometimes the worse for his less distinguished experiences in the same line. In this respect he stands midway between Dumas and Scott, who was hampered as a dramatist either by his habit of narrative writing or by his sense of a necessity to be on his guard against the influence of that habit. *The Ayrshire Tragedy*, I have always thought, might have been a splendid success instead of being what it is, a

more than creditable attempt, had its author been content to work on the same lines as the author of *Arden of Feversham*; foregoing all pretence and all endeavour to alter or modify or qualify or improve in any degree or in any detail the exact course of the incidents recorded.

The narrative or historic drama, the poetical chronicle of events represented in action rather than by relation, is one of the noblest and most legitimate forms of national poetry: none can be higher, none is more simple, none more difficult: but much of its dignity and value must depend on the constancy of the dramatist in his adherence to this difficult simplicity of treatment—on his perfect singleness of eye and straightforward fidelity of hand. Scott, thinking to improve and simplify by the process of adaptation and selection a complicated record of tragic events, impaired the interest and debased the value of his mutilated story. The old lamp of Marlowe, of Shakespeare, and of Ford would have guided him, as it has guided Sir Henry Taylor, on a straighter path to a surer goal than could be attained by the new light of the modern scene-shifter. Mr. Reade, by far the greatest master of narrative whom our country has produced since the death of Scott, was as much his superior in dramatic dexterity as he was inferior to Dumas in the art of concealing rather than obtruding his natural command and his practical comprehension of this peculiar talent. It is the lack of that last and greatest art—not the art to blot, but the art to veil—it is the inability to keep his hand close, to abstain from proclamation and ostentation, to be content with a quiet and triumphant display of his skill and

knowledge and experience in all the rules and all the refinements of the game—it is this that sets him, as a narrative artist, so decidedly below Dumas; it is the lack of seeming unconsciousness and inevitable spontaneity which leaves his truest and finest pathos less effective and less durable in its impression than the truest and finest pathos of Scott.

The now fashionable comparison or contrast of Charles Reade with George Eliot seems to me altogether less profitable and less reasonable than a contrast or comparison of his work with that of the two most copious and spontaneous masters of romance. Indeed, had not the idolators of either insisted with amœbæan ardour on the superior claims of their respective favourite to the same station and the same palm, I should have thought it indisputable that there could be no matter of dispute between the claims of two writers who had hardly an aim or a quality in common. What Charles Reade at his best could do, George Eliot could not even have attempted; what George Eliot could achieve at her best would have been as impossible for Charles Reade to accomplish as for the author of *Les Trois Mousquetaires* to have written a chapter of *Les Parents Pauvres*.

George Eliot, though not exactly a petticoated Shakespeare, was at once something more and something less than an English Balzac. I am not so certain as her exclusive partisans affirm themselves to be that her more laboured and finished figures have really more life in them than Reade's; that Caleb Garth, as an able and ardent advocate maintains, is a more actual and genuine person, a figure more distinct and positive, more

worthy to be remembered 'as a personal friend,'[1] than David Dodd: nor yet that Lucy his wife 'is essentially other than' the woman who might have grown out of the girl so delicately and so vividly presented in the most perfect of all the author's books. Such an error would hardly have been possible to a writer of such conscientious and pertinacious industry, combined with such genuine self-respect and such ardent self-esteem. A third great novelist, of rarer genius but less loyalty than Reade's to the demands of his art, and naturally, therefore, of less faith in the value of his work, might give us an admirable portrait of an old knave as a pendant to the admirable portrait of a young scoundrel which he had given us many years before, and fail to convince us that the splendid libertine and scholar, the classic laureate of college fame, whom we knew as George Brandon in the heyday of superb and daring youth, could become a fawning and fulsome dunce, unable to construe a sentence of Latin, or to avoid the most vulgar errors of awkward pretention and flagrant sycophancy. Dr. Brand Firmin is a figure as excellently drawn as young Brandon, but surely not the same figure, modified simply by the advance of years and the change of circumstances. Mrs. Dodd, with her gentle self-reliance and pliable fortitude, is surely just such a woman as the cares and joys of happy wifehood and motherhood might have made of the quick-witted, dexterous, and generous girl, so hardly and so strangely won by so noble a lover in the pride of her youth and beauty.

Idle, however, as may be the general comparison of

[1] *Spectator*, April 19, 1884.

a writer like Charles Reade with a writer like George Eliot, there is at least this one point of plausible comparison between their two solitary attempts in the field of historic fiction: that the same age of the world has been chosen by both for the setting of their stories, and that part of the action of Charles Reade's takes place in the country which was chosen by George Eliot for the stage of her whole romance. Beyond this they have so little in common that nothing can be easier than for the champions of either to triumph in alternate demonstration of what the one has accomplished and the other has failed to achieve. No rational admirer will dispute the assertion that the author of *The Cloister and the Hearth* could not have completed—could not have conceived—so delicate a study in scientific psychology as the idlest or least sympathetic reader of *Romola* must recognize and admire in the figure of Tito; that his work shows nothing of such exquisite research and unfaltering subtlety in the anatomical demonstration of every process through which a human soul may pass in the course of decomposition, from the stage in which the subject would seem no worse a man than Mercutio to that in which he would seem no better than Lucio, and thence again to that in which he would seem no better than Iachimo—a creature distinguishable only by inferiority of intellect from Iago. There never was, I suppose, so thorough and triumphant an exposition of spiritual decay: the only touch of reserve which tempers or allays the full zest and fervour of our admiration is given by a half-stifled, reluctant, irrepressible perception or suspicion that there is something in all this of the preacher's or the lecturer's aim, variously gar-

nished and delicately disguised ; that Tito is presented —after the fashion of Richardson or George Sand—as a warning or fearful example, rather than simply represented—after the fashion of Shakespeare or of Balzac—as a natural and necessary figure. This may no doubt be merely a perverse fancy; but at all events it is for some readers an insurmountable impediment to the fullness of their pleasure and admiration. Now, when Mr. Reade's work makes anything of the like impression on us, we see at once that it matters less ; for his didactic types or monitory figures are always unmistakable—and unmistakable as failures. Hawes, and even Grotait—a much more lifelike and interesting person than Hawes, are not the creations of a dramatist ; they are the creatures of a mechanist : you see the action of the wirepuller behind at every movement they make ; you feel at every word they utter that the ruffian is speaking by the book, talking in character, playing up to his part. Too refined and thoughtful an artist to run the least risk of any such error, George Eliot, on the other hand, wanted the dramatic touch, the skilful and vivid sleight of craftsmanship, which gives a general animation at once to the whole group of characters and to the whole movement of the action in every story, from the gravest to the slightest, ever written by Charles Reade. A story better conceived or better composed, better constructed or better related, than *The Cloister and the Hearth*, it would be difficult to find anywhere ; while the most enthusiastic devotees of *Romola* must surely admit the wellnigh puerile insufficiency of some of the resources by which the story has to be pushed forward or warped round before it can be got into harbour.

There is an almost infantine audacity of awkwardness in the device of handing your heroine at a pinch into a casually empty boat which drifts her away to a casually plague-stricken village, there to play the part of a casual sister of mercy dropped down from the sky by providential caprice, at the very nick of time when the novelist was helplessly at a loss for some more plausible contrivance, among a set of people equally strange to the reader and herself. Such an episode as this—an outrage at once on common credulity and on that natural logic of art which no school of romance can with impunity permit its disciples to ignore or to defy—neither Scott nor Dumas nor Reade would have allowed himself, even in a mere tale of adventure or 'moving accidents,' while his genius was still on the whole at its best and brightest; as George Eliot's most indisputably was, when *Romola* was written.

Again, I must confess my agreement with the critics who find in her study of Savonarola a laborious, conscientious, absolute failure—as complete as the failure of his own actual attempt to purge and renovate the epoch of the Borgias by what Mr. Carlyle would have called the 'Morison's Pill' of Catholic Puritanism. Charles Reade's Dominican is worth a dozen such 'wersh,' ineffectual, invertebrate studies, taken by marshlight and moonshine, as this spectre of a spectre which flits across the stage of romance to as little purpose as did its original across the stage of history: but when we come to collation of minor characters and groups the superiority of the male novelist is so obvious and so enormous that any comparison between the full robust proportions of his breathing figures and the stiff thin

outlines of George Eliot's phantasmal puppets would be unfair if it were not unavoidable. The variety of life, the vigour of action, the straightforward and easy mastery displayed at every step in every stage of the fiction, would of themselves be enough to place *The Cloister and the Hearth* among the very greatest masterpieces of narrative; while its tender truthfulness of sympathy, its ardour and depth of feeling, the constant sweetness of its humour, the frequent passion of its pathos, are qualities in which no other tale of adventure so stirring and incident so inexhaustible can pretend to a moment's comparison with it—unless we are foolish enough to risk a reference to the name by which no contemporary name can hope to stand higher or shine brighter, for prose or for verse, than does that of Shakespeare's greatest contemporary by the name of Shakespeare.

The wealth and splendour of invention, the superb command of historic resource, and the animating instinct which gives life to every limb and feature of the story, interest to every detail of various learning, and the charm of perfect credibility to the wildest phases of passion or of faith, the strangest adventure or coincidence, the boldest strokes of worse or better fortune which influence or modify the progress of character and event, would need more time and space to indicate and to praise with any show of adequacy than I can hope to afford them here. But this book is foundation enough, if any ground for prophecy may be supplied by the fortunes of other books, for a fame as durable as any romancer's ambition could desire. It is so copious and various that the strength and skill with which the unity of interest is

maintained through all diversities of circumstance and byplay of episodes may almost be called incomparable: Dumas has never shown such power and tenderness of touch in the conduct and support of a story so pure and profound in its simplicity of effect through such a web of many-coloured adventure. And for vivid play of incident, for versatile animation of detail, Dumas himself seems no longer incomparable in his kind to the reader of this book. He will miss indeed the charm of self-effacing straightforwardness which distinguishes the very finest narratives of the Frenchman. Dumas could sometimes forget Dumas, but Reade can never forget Reade: the one at his very best thinks only of the story he has to tell, and tells it with no more strain or show of effort than a child: the other is always on parade, always delightedly conscious of his powers and unhesitatingly ostentatious of his delight. But there are scenes in the *The Cloister and the Hearth* which Dumas, for all his excellent heart and all his brilliant genius, could hardly have written or conceived: such as the discovery of the baby in the hermit's cell by its unconscious father.

It seems singular that any important work of the hand which has given us so noble and high-toned a book as this great romance should ever have been taxed with immorality; and more singular still that it should in any sense be fairly liable to such a charge. Of the two among Mr. Reade's novels which were assailed on this score at the date of their first appearance, the later, *A Terrible Temptation*, seems to me the more easily and the more thoroughly defensible. Such attacks on it as I remember to have seen were not generally based on

the simple fact that it contained a remarkably lifelike and brilliant study of a courtesan—ultimately transfigured by conversion into a field-preacher: they were based on the imputation that the married heroine of the story was represented as hovering more or less near the edge of adultery. How such a notion can ever have slipped into the head, I do not say of any rational and candid reader, but of the most viciously virtuous reviewer that ever gave tongue on the slot of an imaginary scandal, I have never been able to imagine. It requires not merely a vigorous effort of charity, but a determined innocence in the ways of the world of professional moralists, to believe that any reader of the book, at any stage of the story, can have really mistaken the character of the 'terrible' and most natural temptation which besets the tender and noble nature of the heroine: a temptation, not to illicit love, but to legal fraud instigated by conjugal devotion. To me this has always seemed one of the very best and truest in study of character, most rich in humour and interest, most faithful and natural in evolution and result, of all Mr. Reade's longer or shorter stories.

But for tragic power, for unfaltering command over all the springs and secrets of terror and pity, it is not comparable with the book which would beyond all question be generally acknowledged by all competent judges as his masterpiece, if its magnificent mechanism were not vitiated by a moral flaw in the very mainspring of the action. This mainspring, if we may believe the subtitle of *Griffith Gaunt*, is supplied by the passion of jealousy. But the vile crime on which the whole action of the latter part of the story depends, and but for

which the book would want its very finest effects of pathos and interest, is not prompted by jealousy at all: it is prompted by envy. A man tied by law to a wife whom he believes unfaithful has inadvertently, by no fault of his, won the heart of a woman who believes him free, and has nursed him back from death to life. Unable to offer her marriage, and aware of her innocent regard for him, he loyally determines to withdraw from her society. An old suitor of hers meets and taunts him in the hour of his leave-taking. Instantly, rather than face the likelihood of a rival's triumph, the coward turns back and offers his hand to the girl, whose good offices he requites by deliberate betrayal of her trust and innocence to secret and incurable dishonour. This is no more an act of jealousy than murder by slow poison is an act of impatience. It is an act of envy; and one of the basest on record in fiction or in fact.

If the assailants of the book had confined their scheme of attack to this one hopelessly indefensible point, it would have been vain for the author to rage and foam over their alleged malignity and misrepresentation. The blemish can no more be erased by blustering impeachment of critical objectors than the blemish which disfigures what should have been George Eliot's masterpiece can be whitewashed by apology grounded on the uncertain and inexplicable caprices of attraction and attachment which may perplex the observing student of actual life.

We do not forbid an artist in fiction to set before us strange instances of inconsistency and eccentricity in conduct: but we require of the artist that he should make us feel such aberrations to be as clearly inevitable

as they are confessedly exceptional. If he can do this, but not otherwise, he has a right to maintain that fiction, like wisdom, is justified of all her children. George Sand, in her memoirs, objects to one of the most powerful scenes in *La Cousine Bette* on the score that a woman like Adeline Hulot could by no possibility, even for the sake of her daughter's life and happiness, have offered herself as a tardy victim to the waning passion of a man like Célestin Crevel. On this point a woman of genius must be a better judge than any man, were he Shakespeare or Balzac, could reasonably pretend to be; but it will be admitted by all that in the case disputed Balzac has at least succeeded in showing the all but irresistible and intolerable force of the temptation to which he may have been wrong in representing a wellnigh maddened and desperate mother as ready, despite an agony of abhorrence, for a moment to succumb. Now it seems to me undeniable that Charles Reade has not succeeded in making us feel it inevitable—and therefore has not succeeded in making us feel it possible—that an honourable man should be so mastered by the temptation or provocation which assails Griffith Gaunt as to throw all sense of honour to the winds rather than endure the momentary sting of insult from an inferior: any more than George Eliot has succeeded in making us feel it inevitable—or possible—that a high-minded woman should be so fascinated by the seduction of accident and the compulsion of circumstance as to forget for even an hour all sense of loyalty and duty for the sake of any one who has not inspired her with such profound and enduring passion as overrides all hindrance and overrules all thought.

Inadequacy of temptation, more than anything else,

reduces the spiritual tone or moral effect of a story which depends for its evolution upon the less or greater force of potential resistance or endurance of temptation ascribed to the character for which our interest is demanded. Othello yields, and excites nothing but our love and pity: Leontes yields, and excites nothing but our disgust and horror: because in the one case the temptation applied is adequate, whereas in the other it is not. But Leontes is not for a moment presented to us as an object of possible sympathy: he is at once revealed as a tyrant, ignoble, impure, mean-spirited, savage and selfish, with just a touch of coarse animal tenderness for the child whom his base and brutal egotism inadvertently condemns to death.

Now Griffith Gaunt is represented, throughout the first half of the story which bears his name, not indeed as a man so wholly noble as the noble Moor, but as a man very different from the ruffianly fool Leontes: as a hot-blooded, headstrong, single-hearted, gallant and generous barbarian of the higher English type: with rather more brain than Squire Western, and rather more delicacy than Tom Jones. To make this man behave in a fashion worthy of Jonathan Wild or Blifil is an incongruity of which Fielding would have been as incapable as Thackeray. Here again, if I mistake not, we may trace the dangerous influence of the stage. The author had contracted not merely a theatrical style of writing, but a theatrical habit of mind: he saw, with the quick eye of a cunning playwright, the splendid opening for stage effects of surprise, anxiety, and terror, supplied by means of this incident to the future progress of the story: he could not forego such magnificent opportunities: he

would not see, he could not consider, what a price he would be obliged to pay for them: no less than the inevitable destruction, in the mind of every reader worth having, of all sympathetic or serious interest in the future fortunes of his hero. It is the infallible note of the playwright as distinguished from the dramatist, of Euripides or Fletcher as opposed to Sophocles or Shakespeare, to find himself sooner or later reduced to choose between the consistency of his characters and the effectiveness of his situations; and when confronted with this dilemma to determine that character must rather be sacrificed to effect than effect give way to character. For the great dramatic poets this difficulty seems scarcely to have existed; and this is the crowning test, the final evidence, of supreme and culminating power in the highest province of the subtlest and sublimest and most arduous of all forms of art. But if it had—if Sophocles or Shakespeare had been driven to choose between two dangers—we may be sure which alternative would have commended itself to the choice of either. It would not have been the sacrifice of character—it would not have been the immolation of nature to the exigences of the stage. It would rather have been to resign a tempting occasion for startling effect, a shining opportunity for electric excitement of the spectator's or the reader's nerves, than to attain this triumphant result at the cost of representing Ajax as a dastard or Œdipus as a dullard, Hotspur as a liar or Hamlet as a fool.

Fletcher, on the other hand, or Euripides, would not for an instant have hesitated in making such a sacrifice; and would apparently have been astonished to hear that in doing so he had cut away the very root of interest

from the very centre of his dramatic scheme or ethical design—had withdrawn from the creation of his fancy the essential property of imaginative life; that quality of moral truth, that condition of credible reality, the want of which deprives fiction of all right to exist and all reason for existing. The protagonist, under such circumstances, is no longer a good or a bad man, nor even a man of mixed and ambiguous character: he is the incongruous abortion of a playwright's incoherent brain, an Admetus or a Philaster, whose worse and better attributes are not inconsistent merely but incompatible with each other. Now, absurd beyond all depths of ridicule as it undoubtedly would be to speak of the greatest or even a greater novelist than the world has ever seen in the same breath with the greatest of its poets, it would be only less foolish to deny the superiority of such a writer as the author of *Griffith Gaunt*, considered as a student of life and an artist in character, to such writers as the Fletcher of Athens and the Euripides of England. The former, at his best, was a master of easy pathos, and a graceful adept in fluent and picturesque lyrical verse of a kind far enough from the highest; the latter was a master of romantic comedy, of tragic melodrama, of sentimental or farcical invention shot through with living lights of witty or pathetic fancy: but as lifelike painters or full-length students of human nature it would be simply grotesque to consider them worthy to be taken into any serious account. No critic worth notice will assert as much of Reade: and therefore we have a right to observe, and therefore it is a duty to object, when we find so masterly an artist in character condescending to the slovenly and shifty level

of an Euripides or a Fletcher. And they at least, when they found themselves unable to draw, could sing: the sweetness of their voices has in either case made many generations of admirers overlook or forget or condone, perhaps with too partial and too facile a promptitude, their carelessness and weakness and clumsiness of hand. A novelist, perhaps not unhappily for his art and himself, has no such resource to fall back upon, can offer no such plea in arrest of judgment, as this of the peccant poet's; a plea which after all is more or less irrelevant and inadequate. He must rest his defence—it is well for him indeed if he can rest it—on such pleas as may be urged with almost incomparable force in apology for the single defect of moral harmony in the story of Griffith Gaunt. No language can overpraise what hardly any praise can sufficiently acknowledge—the masterly construction, the sustained intensity of interest, the keen and profound pathos, the perfect and triumphant disguise of triumphant and perfect art, the living breath of passion, the spontaneous and vivid interaction of character and event, the noble touches of terror and the sublimer strokes of pity, which raise this story almost as high as prose can climb towards poetry, and set it perhaps as near as narrative can come to drama. The forty-third chapter is to my mind simply one of the most beautiful things in English literature; and no fitter praise can be given to the book than this—that so exquisite an interlude is not out of keeping with the rest.

Great as was usually the care displayed in the composition of Mr. Reade's other works, and great as was sometimes the skill which ensured success to this ungrudging and conscientious labour of love, there is not

another of his books which as an all but absolute and consummate work of art can be set beside or near this masterpiece. In most of his longer stories there are some parts so very much better and some parts so very much worse than the rest of the book, as inevitably to raise this difficult and delicate question—How long can a work of art be expected to live, which depends for its chance of life rather on the excellence of episodes, on the charm of a single character or the effect of a particular scene, than on the final harmony and satisfying impression of the whole? On the answer to this question —an answer to be ratified by the verdict of time alone —hangs the fate of many a noble piece of work in verse no less than in prose. It condemned for upwards of two centuries to 'dust and damned oblivion' all the matchless and magnificent tragic poetry of the Shakespearean age but Shakespeare's. Even when the day of resurrection dawns for such work so long entombed, it revives too often only in the partial light afforded here and there by the lamp of a special student. The best of Mr. Reade's romances are certainly not more finished works of higher or more faultless art than the best plays of Ford or Webster: their faults are generally not less gross and glaring than such as disfigure the masterpieces of Dekker or of Middleton. Will the names of their heroines be better known to more generations than the names of Calantha and Vittoria, Infelice and Beatrice-Joanna? Will their splendid scenes of flood and fight and storm, their vivid interludes of passion, the subtlety and variety of their 'humours'—and some of these may fairly challenge the full test of Ben Jonson's famous definition—will all suffice to keep them longer afloat

than many a work less worthy to survive than the worst of them?

All we can say is that, if not, the loss will be theirs who shall have let such good merchandise go to wreck. It will be a loss—whatever good work of its own an age which utterly neglects them may produce—to know nothing of a book so full of keenly refined humour and nobly moving incident, such good studies and such good scenes, as that which carries the rather silly label, 'Love me little, love me long.' (By the way, it would be a benevolent despotism, and worthy of Mr. Arnold's ideal academy, which should make it a penal offence against literature for any writer to affix a proverb, a phrase, a quotation, but above all things a line of poetry, by way of tag or title, to his novel or to hers. Scripture and Shakespeare should be specially prohibited: and we should see no more such advertisements as 'A Girgashite,' 'His Own Figtree,' 'Down a Steep Place,' 'A Pillar of Salt,' 'Keep Close,' 'Jenny's Case,' 'The Ocular Proof,' 'An Ounce of Civet,' and so forth: which, to put it on the lowest ground, would be an advantage to common decency.) The story of David Dodd's courtship seems to me on the whole the most perfect of Charles Reade's works: both men and women, even when arranged for stage effect and adjusted for stage purposes, move and speak like real actors in the real human comedy: and the child, particularly in his character of special correspondent, commends himself to all readers of experience as what the peculiar object of Mr. Reade's literary and moral aversion would have called a Reality and no Phantasm. It seems to me not at all easier to draw a lifelike child than to draw a lifelike

man or woman: Shakespeare and Webster were the only two men of their age who could do it with perfect delicacy and success: at least, if there was another who could, I must crave pardon of his happy memory for my forgetfulness or ignorance of his name. Our own age is more fortunate, on this single score at least, having a larger and a far nobler proportion of female writers: among whom, since the death of George Eliot, there is none left whose touch is so exquisite and masterly, whose love is so thoroughly according to knowledge, whose bright and sweet invention is so fruitful, so truthful, or so delightful as Mrs. Molesworth's. Any chapter of *The Cuckoo Clock* or the enchanting *Adventures of Herr Baby* is worth a shoal of the very best novels dealing with the characters and fortunes of mere adults.

The story in which the small figure of 'the terrible infant' is used with such humorous dexterity to further the fortunes and illustrate the characters of his elders may perhaps be considered in days to come a completer and happier example of its author's powers than any of his more ambitious and varied and eventful narratives. A man's most perfect work is not likely to be his greatest, unless the man himself be one of the very greatest writers of all time; and the full energy of Mr. Reade's genius is conspicuous rather in works less free from his besetting sins of pretention and prolixity. For, concise as was his usual method of narrative or comment, and indeed sometimes rather defiantly demonstrative of this excellent faculty of concision, he could be tediously prolix in the reiteration and reinforcement of theories and arguments by illustration and exposition at far

greater length than was necessary or suitable to the very effect at which he aimed.

Dickens, so often accused of extravagance and repetition, was far more temperate and reserved, had a far finer instinct for selection and suppression, than Reade. Here again, as in his apparent unconsciousness that fact done into fiction may easily or may ever become disgusting and insufferable, he reminds us of the too conscientious and too assiduous author of *Nana*. What has been so absurdly—not to say, so impudently—attempted in the cases of Samuel Richardson and Walter Scott would be less an outrage than a service to the genius and the memory of Charles Reade. Their masterpieces may be destroyed by evisceration: they cannot be condensed by compression. More than one or two of Reade's, if taken duly in hand by some less incapable restorer than the mutilators of *Guy Mannering* and *Clarissa Harlowe*, could only gain by the sweeping removal of much undigested rubbish. The author's own principle of selection may not have been as capricious as it appears; but when he struck out of his longest novel that admirable *Autobiography of a Thief* which is one of his finest and most thoughtful pieces of work, it is difficult to understand why he should have retained so much else which smacks alternately of sensational playbills and nauseating police reports. This little record is nothing less than a masterpiece of tragi-comedy: the fellow's style is perhaps the very finest evidence of his creator's dramatic faculty which could be adduced from the whole collection of Charles Reade's romances. That faculty, however, brilliant and versatile as it is, is never so thoroughly or so strikingly displayed

in the full completion or consummation of the work undertaken as in the vivid energy of single scenes, the vivid relief of single characters. The same, we must confess, may sometimes be said of all his contemporaries —even of the great masters who gave us *Esmond* and *David Copperfield.*

Mr. Trollope, in his singularly candid and interesting as well as amusing estimate of his own and other men's work, does not pretend to anticipate a survival of remembrance for more than two or three among the well-nigh innumerable figures of his industrious and pertinacious invention. I should be disposed to assign a fully equal chance of survival to several others of their kindred: but when he foretells oblivion or neglect for Mr. Reade on the ground that he has left no such living and enduring figures—not 'a character that will remain'—in any part of his work, the judgment seems to me as rash and foolish as his remarks on the rashness and foolishness of Mr. Reade's own bearing and behaviour in various matters of controversy are sensible and sound.

Reade's unhappy and ludicrous habit of sputtering at any objection taken to any part or feature of his work, of yelling and foaming at any reflection cast on any one who had the fortune or misfortune of his friendship or acquaintance, was less injurious to his fame than what his friendly rival has justly stigmatized as his amazing misconception of the duty—nay, the very nature and essence—of literary honesty. It must be allowed that he was rich enough to have dispensed with borrowed or stolen goods; that the assailant who should attribute his pilferings to the necessity of conscious incompetence, to the compulsion of intellectual penury,

would stand self-confuted and self-convicted of stupidity as perverse as Mr. Reade's own fancy that he could honestly buy the produce of another man's brain and honourably pass it off as the produce of his own.

But this does not improve either the morality or the comprehensibility of his position: nor does it justify, however fully it may explain, the rabid virulence of his retorts on those who differed from his theory or objected to his practice. Strength and plainness of speech are thoroughly commendable only when the application of plain terms and strong epithets is so manifestly just that no man of common honesty and candour will question its justice or its necessity. To insist on calling a spade a toothpick is not more foolish than to insist on calling a toothpick a spade. All effect is destroyed, all force is withdrawn from the strongest phrases in the language, when a critic who merely objects to the method or impugns the conclusions of an author is assailed in such terms as would be simply proper and requisite to define the character of a detractor who skulks aside or sneaks away from responsibility for words which he might be called upon, by the force of general opinion or the law of literary honour, at once to swallow or to prove.

A brainless and frontless trafficker in scandal, a secret and scurrilous traducer who strews insult and scatters defamation in the holes and corners of crepuscular and furtive literature, behind the backs of men who have met with equally contemptuous indifference his previous advances and his previous impertinences, must, if he be a responsible creature, know himself to be, in the eyes of any one with any pretention to honour, a person of such unspeakably infamous character that

every foul word or insolent allusion which in conscious security from all chance of reprisals he may venture to cast at his superiors does but more loudly proclaim him a liar and a slanderer, a coward and a cur. Such an one, in homely English, is by common consent a blackguard: and a blackguard who invites and challenges the chastisement of exposure is not less indisputably a blockhead. These, in such a case, are terms of scientific definition rather than of individual obloquy. But when terms are straightforward and epithets as forcible as these are habitually flung at the head of any one who rightly or wrongly asserts that a man's verses are bad poetry, that his play is a dull performance or his novel a stupid story, then, were the critic never so much in the wrong, the author will have contrived to put him, comparatively speaking, in the right. Much more will this be the case when the charge, even if unjust and excessive in the wording of its expression, is grounded on indisputable facts. That I am no lukewarm admirer of Mr. Reade's genius will hardly, I presume, be questioned by any reader of these lines; and his warmest admirers have the best right to place on record their regret that he should have made it necessary for them to remark on the singular lack of taste and judgment displayed in the collection and preservation of his most unwise and violent extravagances in the field of personal or critical controversy. Honest indignation is a great thing when it makes great verses, and a good thing when it makes good prose: but the fact is no less obvious than lamentable that Reade's, however unaffected it may have been, had only too often no foothold in reason, no ground of common sense to stand on.

From a writer capable of such vehement follies and such high-toned ambitions, a rational reader would naturally have expected nothing better, if nothing worse, than Reade has left behind him. What Mr. Trollope says of Charlotte Brontë is more exactly true, it seems to me, of Charles Reade. 'If it could be right to judge the work of a novelist from one small portion of one novel,'—or rather, in this case, from sundry small portions of various novels—'and to say of an author that he is to be accounted as strong as he shows himself to be in his strongest morsel of work,'—then, to finish the sentence for myself, I should say that the station of Charles Reade would be high among the very highest workers in creative fiction. As a painter of manners, and of character as affected by social conditions, he is never much above Trollope at his best; indeed I doubt if he has ever done anything at all better than the study of that hapless, high-souled, unmanageable and irrational saint and hero, whose protracted martyrdom and ultimate deliverance give such original and unique interest to *The Last Chronicle of Barset.* More delightfully actual and lifelike groups or figures than the Grantlys, the Luftons, and the Proudies, it would be impossible to find on any canvas of Mr. Reade's: and these leading figures or groups of Barsetshire society are sketched with such lightness of hand, such an attractive ease and simplicity of manner, that the obtrusive and persistent vehemence of presentation which distinguishes the style and the method of Charles Reade appears by comparison inartistic and ineffectual. Perhaps he did not think better of his own characters than they deserved: but he would seem to have thought worse than

it probably deserves of his average reader's intelligence, in supposing it incompetent or slow to appreciate, with quiet recognition and peaceable approval, the charm or the force of character, the strength or the subtlety of motive displayed in the conduct of action or dialogue, without some vigorous note of more or less direct and personal appeal to the attention and admiration required by the writer as his due.

But this and all other defects or infirmities of his genius disappear or become transfigured when it suddenly takes fire and spreads wing for heights far beyond the reach of the finest painter of social manners, the most faithful and trustworthy spokesman or showman of commonplace event and character. There is a vivid force in his best and highest examples of narrative which informs even prose with something of the effect of epic rather than dramatic poetry. There is more romantic beauty, more passionate depth of moral impression, in the penultimate chapter of *Westward Ho !* than in any chapter of Reade's ; but it hardly attains the actual and direct force of convincing as well as exciting effect which we recognize in the narrative of the Agra's last voyage homeward. That magnificent if not matchless narrative is the crowning evidence of its author's genius : if it should not live as long as the language, so much the worse for all students of the language who shall overlook so noble an example of its powers. As much, in my poor opinion, may be said for the narrative of Gerard's adventures in the company of Denys the Burgundian ; this latter, with all deference to the sounder judgment and the finer taste of Mr. Anthony Trollope, 'a character that will remain' as long as most figures in English

fiction. There are characteristic and serious faults in the story called *Put yourself in his place*; the sublimely silly old squire is a venerable stage property not worth so much refurbishing as the author's care has bestowed on it; the narrative is perhaps a little overcharged with details of documentary evidence; but the hero, the villain, and the two or three heroines are all excellently well drawn; the construction or composition of the story is a model of ingenuity, delicacy, and vigour; and the account of the inundation is another of those triumphant instances of masterful and superb description which give actually the same delight, evoke the same admiration, stimulate and satisfy the same intense and fervid interest, on a tenth as on a first reading. There is nothing nearly so good as this in *A Woman-Hater*; but here again the villain is a very creditable villain, the story is well arranged and sustained, the characters generally are well handled and developed. *The Double Marriage* is best in its martial episodes, towards the close; there is in these an apparently lifelike vivacity which makes them seem good enough to be matched against anything I know of the kind in fiction or in history except Stendhal's incomparable picture of a young soldier's experience and emotion—or lack of emotion—on such a field as that of Waterloo. The opening of *La Chartreuse de Parme* remains of course unapproached for concise realism of impression and terse effect of apparent accuracy; but Reade, as a painter of battle, is at once credible, comprehensible, and interesting beyond the run of historians and other dealers in more or less conscientious fiction. In *Foul Play* there is very good writing, with some genuine

pathos and much industrious ingenuity; but it is not, I think, by any means to be counted among its author's more distinct and triumphant successes.

Of his shorter stories, *The Wandering Heir* seems to me very decidedly the worst, *Clouds and Sunshine* as decidedly the best; for the *Autobiography of a Thief* is not so much a story as an episodical study of character, cast with superb ingenuity and most sensitive tact into the form of a prose monodrama. Midway between these I should place *Jack of all Trades*, with the posthumous story of *Singleheart and Doubleface.* But Charles Reade's place in literature must always depend on the ultimate rank assignable to a writer whose reputation has mainly to rely on the value of splendid episodes and the excellence of single figures rather than on the production of any work, in any line of his art, at once so thoroughly single in its aim and so thoroughly perfect in its success, as *The Bride of Lammermoor* or *Notre-Dame de Paris, La Cousine Bette* or *L'Enfant Maudit.* What this rank may be I certainly do not pretend or aspire to foretell. But that he was at his very best, and that not very rarely, a truly great writer of a truly noble genius, I do not understand how any competent judge of letters could possibly hesitate to affirm.

AUGUSTE VACQUERIE.

AUJOURD'HUI ET DEMAIN,
1875.

If there is one fact established beyond disproof with regard to the poetical character, one indisputable certainty set high and seated firm above all doubt or question in the eyes of all practical men by the consent of all authorities no less than by the authority of all experience from the days of Plato to our own, it is this: that the nature of poets is essentially and incurably incompetent to apprehend or to estimate aright the simplest practical matters of public life or polity. Wings they may have, but it is impossible that they should have feet to walk straight, eyes to see clear, hands to work hard on the common ground and in the common air of reality; they are fit only, as we all know, to be crowned and expelled by the same hands, waved off and worshipped at due distance by the rational gratitude of their fellow-citizens. If for once in passing we might venture, in the teeth of a technical rule of logic, to assume as implied the converse of this proposition,

> Which, as I take it, is a kind of puppy
> To the old dam, nonsense—

and yet it cannot of course be that;

> for worthy Plato,
> Who cannot err, he said so—

if, I say, we might for the moment assume that the truth of this theorem must involve the counter truth that all men of proved incompetence and ineptitude for public service or national utility were poets (and some persons might think this as reasonable an article of faith as the original dogma that all poets were thus inept and incompetent), what a teeming and exuberant crop of Homers, Dantes, Shakespeares—the very greatest in their kind—would not the harvest of our own happy day have produced on all hands! Of Miltons I say nothing; the name of that political incompetent and representative dunce in all matters of national interest—a name which will always remain, or so long at least as it can be expected to remain at all, the perennial and proverbial type of poetic inefficiency for patriotic duties, the grand example and evidence to all time of the profound truth and wisdom of the verdict delivered on that score alike by philosophers and by practical men—that name might possibly suggest recollections not altogether in perfect harmony with the immediate argument. What a galaxy of great singers must, according to this theory, be shedding, even while we write, the mild lustre of its beneficent effulgence alike on England and on France! Above all, if inconsequence, incoherence, incapacity for the management of affairs, be indeed the sovereign sign and the satisfying seal of poetic genius, what a dynasty of poets was that which exploded in a fetid fume of immortal ignominy, when the bladder of empire which had swollen for some twenty years of fame and shame burst once for all at Sedan, leaving behind it the savour of its end as of an example to be in due time imitated at Chislehurst, when the whole harvest of human scorn

and historic infamy had been reaped and garnered, and the season at last was ripe for the emperor to go the way of the empire, dying the only natural death by the only inevitable consummation of the system and the man! *Qualis artifex pereo*, moaned the first Nero with the knife trembling at his throat; and in this as in a few other points, if there were anything trustworthy in a theory which would identify poetic power with political impotence, the fugitive son of Agrippina might have found in the fugitive son of Hortense a mimic and a parodist.

Apologising to the memory of the Roman tyrant—who at least had not won his way to empire by the most execrable of all recorded perjuries, nor at the price of any more precious life than that of another emperor—for the suggestion of a parallel so unduly dishonourable even to the name of Nero, we may dismiss the counter proposition or supposition which we have called up to confront and to complete, by way of supplement or antithesis, the well-worn argument of poetic limitation or inadequacy. We have now to note the audacity with which a living poet of high place and lasting name has once more challenged, by act and not by word, the justice or trustworthiness of this Platonic doctrine. Never was it more haughtily and triumphantly impugned by any man in whom the poet was at one with the patriot than it has been for many years now of noble work by M. Auguste Vacquerie. It is without any sense of strangeness that we recognize in his latest book a daring outrage offered to the favourite tenet of philosophic or practical commentators on the nature and the place of poets. For the most noticeable point in this book is perhaps

not the strength nor the grace nor the brilliance of its workmanship, the flash and thrust of a satire

> whose keen wit
> Makes such a wound, the knife is lost in it,

and we see only the supple vigour and exquisite skill of the fencer's wrist who dealt it ; not the high and tender ardour of spirit, the stern and strong desire of justice, a queen and mistress so 'bitterly beloved' of the noblest only among men ; not the heroic passion and pity which fill and freshen every page of it with pure and fiery life ; for all these qualities we may suppose that even philosophers and politicians by profession might condescend to concede as possible to poets, out of the fullness of their candour and their grace ; it is, be it said with their leave or without, the solidity of good sense, the direct radiance of reason, which illuminates and welds together all parts of the building, all views laid open, all principles enforced. There is here nothing vague, windy, indecisive ; we are as far as may be from a land of dreams or shadows. It would be difficult to prove that philosophy was as little given as is poetry to the erection and colonization of Cloudcuckootowns. At all events, no man of decent honesty and common insight, whether or not his own views or hopes may agree in the main or in detail with the ends and the means here advocated, can deny that they are practicable, comprehensible, consistent. Open the book and read at random ; look up whatever subject may especially attract you ; try what the author may have to say on any matter of immediate interest which it may please you to select from the various list of questions here weighed and handled. You

may be a supporter of the penalty of death, a lover of limited or unlimited monarchy, even a wellwisher to clerical as opposed to national education ; you will not be able to say that the present antagonist of your opinions has here assailed them with loose or intemperate declamation, subjected them to other than a candid and cautious exposition, considered them by the light of any medium which might discolour or distort their natural hues and outlines. In every case he cites to the bar not fancies, not consequences, not probabilities perceptible to his own mind's eye, but facts indisputable on either side, patent, flagrant, obvious. You may not accept the necessity of his inferences, but you cannot impeach the validity of his premisses. From first to last he keeps before the reader's eye two primal and final questions. Are these things so or not ? And if they be, are they good or bad, just or unjust ? Fact, evidence, reason, righteousness, these are the authorities to which he appeals, the touchstones which he applies to the matter in hand, the tests to which he brings it for acceptance or rejection ; these, and by no means sentiment, theory, passion, or presumption. Not till it has been thus tried and tested does he bring to bear upon the question at issue the forces of his earnest eloquence or his keen and fiery play of wit.

If there is any one class of writers to whom it is generally admitted that the attribution of practical good sense would be absurd, it is the hapless and profitless class of poets ; if there is any one political party in Europe to whom it is habitually and contemptuously refused by the common cry of their opponents, it is the republican or radical party in France. On this double account especially

I have been careful first of all to note the presence and predominance of this priceless quality of reason throughout the new work of one of the purest republicans and one of the most fervent poets of this age or of any. From such an one, if there were a grain of truth or sense in the cuckoo's catchword of conventional objection, we might have looked for mere ardent and vacuous effusion of spirit and speech, protests and outcries of hysterical improvisation, shrieks of wrath broken by sobs of sensibility, vague lyric appeals to abstract principle, shrill tragic indictment of things disagreeable; and it is cruelly indelicate and inconsiderate on the author's part to have shown us nothing of the kind, but in place of these a power to see clearly and grasp firmly at once the root and the result, the conditions and the issues of each national or social problem which it has been his office to demonstrate or discuss. The weight and edge of his trenchant and pungent style, the point and balance of this vivid and virile prose, which may be likened for these great qualities rather to the verse of Dryden than to any other or humbler parallel I can find in English literature, are never used but to the direct end wanted, in swift and loyal service of the immediate need. This vital and luminous property of language, here applied to the gravest matters of present import, had found as full a scope before in the bright sharp wisdom and wit of *Profils et Grimaces*, in the incisive dramatic force and vigorous variety of *Les Miettes de l'Histoire*; and from the author of those admirable books, so full of fresh and solid food for thought and emotion, even critics averse from his views and incredulous of his creed might perhaps allow that some display of practical and serviceable

faculty might be expected on this ground also; but a reference to his poems would doubtless suffice to dispel from the mind of any serious man all fear to find in the lyrist and dramatist a serious or dangerous antagonist on any political topic. Each leaf in his laurel might be invoked in separate witness of the wearer's inability to deserve a civic as well as a poetic crown; for no forehead could of course be wide enough to support the two; and the singer's wreath worn from his youth upwards by the present claimant of the citizen's is thick and fresh enough of foliage to shadow as high a head and invest as broad a brow as ever was content with one. His first poems I know but by excerpts; enough only to show the writer's early cunning and mastery of supple and vigorous verse, pliant to his various moods of mind and docile to his young strength of hand; his sureness and loftiness of aim, his loyal ardour and clear-sighted ambition. His face was set from the first towards only the high places of song, but his foot from the first was trained in more than one racecourse to run as the racers of old for the prize of a double goal. He led forward Antigone on the modern stage arrayed, not after the fashion of Racine, but after the fashion of Sophocles; not a choral fold of the marble verse disturbed, not a tress astray from the funereal fillet of her hair. Side by side with the holy figure revived and reclothed with the glory of song by this august and serene labour of love, he let loose Tragaldabas, unmuzzled and uncombed, on the same astonished boards, to be hooted at by nameless throats and applauded by the noblest hands then working in the same wide field. This compound product of broad fantastic farce and graceful

romantic intrigue may either recall those early children of Shakespeare's genius begotten by strong-limbed humour on lyric fancy, or suggest what might be the modern equivalent of a Greek satyric drama, had we some ampler model to observe, some more potent example to study, than the one lonely little offspring of the gayer genius of Euripides, known here under the auspices of a far different poet from its father as the fosterchild of Shelley. In the comic and romantic poem which gives us the broad bright smile of his young genius, Auguste Vacquerie may perhaps, for aught we can tell, have shown as much of radical affinity to the spirit of an ancient Greek as in his chaste and severe engraving from the outline of Sophocles. Certain it is that the admixture of rough and loud burlesque, now with graver humour and now with tender and radiant interludes of romance, would have deserved the applause of any audience accustomed to appreciate the fine and potent infusion of one excellence with another, which is the special note of poetic comedy in its hours of fullest freedom. The position of Eliseo, containing as it does the very core and kernel of the deeper humour of the poem, could only have been conceived, as the scene in which he pleads with Tragaldabas to spare his own precious life, and resist for his friends' and country's sake all temptations to the high-souled suicide of a noble nature grown weary of men's misconception, could only have been carried through, by a comic poet of fresh and rare genius in that subtler kind which, as Théophile Gautier observed of this very part, has something of a sorrowful secret meaning or moral in its mirth. His adaptation of Falstaff to the French stage

is known to me only by Gautier's admirable prologue; but I would fain hope against hope that it may have done more justice than the verdict of Victor Hugo has shown to the sunnier and less seamy side of Falstaff's moral nature. The great master who has fought all his life long against capital punishment has summed up against the fat immortal in the very tone and spirit of a hanging judge of old; the voice in which he passes sentence has the accent of Jefferies rather than of Gascoigne. I will not undertake to vindicate for Falstaff the possession of every virtue—of probity, for example, and chastity; but, to say nothing of that placid presence of mind and passivity of cynic courage which if no spur of honour could excite yet no stroke of danger could disturb, it is unaccountable to me how any student should be able to overlook or to ignore the care taken by Shakespeare to bring at last into full relief those true and tender elements mixed into the old knight's nature which caused his heart to break, not at the fall of his fortunes, but at the unkindness of his friend ('the king has killed his heart'), and which so bound to him in life and death the hearts of his poor rascally followers that Bardolph, when 'the fuel was gone that maintained that fire,' could but wish he 'were with him, wheresome'er he is, either in heaven or in hell.' It cannot be allowed that 'the dynasty of good sense, inaugurated in Panurge, continued in Sancho Panza, goes wrong and miscarries in Falstaff;' who is at least cleanlier than the henchman of Pantagruel, and fully as constant as the squire of Quixote. Probably, when the master wrote this, his mind was running less on the follower of Prince Hal than on Trimalchio and his bastard brood, the

pimps who kept the door and the lackeys who swept the stage for the murderous mountebanks of the Lower Empire.

Of Auguste Vacquerie's later plays, I have only time to choose two for a passing mention, and give a brief word of recognition to the keen-edged grace and subtle radiance of thought and art which fill the little comic poem of *Souvent Homme Varie*, to the depth and delicacy of noble passion which inform the inward and spiritual tragedy set forth under so new, so sad, and so grand a symbol in the catastrophe of *Les Funérailles de l'Honneur*; a play which in the purely ideal impression of its close, the subordination of external to internal effect in the process of the scene to its final completion in a natural and inevitable yet sudden and artistic surprise, may recall the incomparable consummation of Ford's *Broken Heart*. It may be worth reflection as well as remark that Victor Hugo and his noblest pupil —pupil in no servile but only a filial sense, worthy of elder and younger poet alike—should have been the two chief or only poets of our age to do honour to the high tradition of honour embodied in the claims and duties of long descent, to celebrate with a lofty sympathy the heroism of that old loyalty which can bear no stain on its blazon but of blood—the fine flower of aristocracy at its highest and best; that the time should find none but the lips of republicans, confessors and martyrs of the democratic principle which alone can show now its golden book of knights and heroes, champions of an actual crusade and peers of a present chivalry as noble and more fruitful than the past, to set forth the praise of the ancient patrician faith in our fathers which was the

root of so proud a virtue, so tender a sense of shame, so haughty a rule of right ; while from court poets of duly insular and monarchical opinions we get but the thin vixenish echo of a petty, trite, and rather vulgar satire or sermon on family prejudice and pride, spiced with the stale and sterile commonplaces of cheap invective or querulous ridicule with which a thin and threadbare middle-class Liberalism was long since free to denounce or deprecate in a plaintive or an acrid key the pride and reserve of an aristocracy whose notice or alliance, if accorded, was sure to sweeten the most acid humours of an ignoble discontent. Not from official royalists and conservative reformers of this type may we look for aught that might emulate the scene of the portraits in *Hernani* or that of the empty grave made ready for other than a bodily occupant in *Les Funérailles de l'Honneur*.

The clear terse excellence of a style in which weight and point are alike noticeable is in all the work of Auguste Vacquerie equally fit for prompt and perfect service to the poet's thought or purpose, whether this be grave or light, of general or of immediate import ; and the fine instinct of construction which retains the interest of the student while it sustains the harmony of the design seems to me more wholly adequate to the task required of it in these latter plays than even in the recast form of *Tragaldabas*. The natural skill of the artist's hand is now in better training, its fruit more ripe and solid from the flawless core to the speckless rind of the poem. The attraction of direct and progressive effect, in which perhaps the smallest part is that due to the creation and satisfaction of suspense and surprise,

is impaired by no lapse or aberration from the straight dramatic way. This good gift is not less conspicuous in each of the brief tragic poems which stand out like dark blossoms of aconite or poppy among the green pasture-lands and golden harvest-fields of that noble book of song called *Mes Premières Années de Paris*. In one of these, the subtlest perhaps in motive, it should be noted with what an intuitive skill the poet has averted from his work all pretext for the charge of imitation to which the scheme, in less vigorous hands, would surely have made it liable; so that a double catastrophe which on one side recalls *Angelo*, on the other *La Coupe et les Lèvres*, becomes by the act of combination original, and able to hold its own above any suspicion of undue debt either to Hugo or to Musset. These little tragedies, for closeness of thought and heat of action or emotion, for power of condensed and compressed passion, are best comparable with the studies of Mr. Browning in the same form of art; there is something of a kindred force and correspondence of aims and powers in the passionate and reflective work of the French and the English poet, in the pensive and fiery concentration which is a distinctive note of the genius of either. This fusion of tragic and philosophic faculty is one chief test of ability to deal with the high resources and strange secrets of dramatic art; without it a writer may be a poet, a playwright, a student of character, but not even in promise or in presage a dramatist.

In the same book all readers competent to weigh French verse with English will not fail to estimate aright the strength and cunning of hand with which the *Accession of Henry the Fifth* has been adapted from Shake-

speare. The masterly transfusion into a new tongue of the famous scene between the prince and his dying father attains here and there to a fidelity and delicacy of touch hardly less than miraculous; and the pliant vigour of the verse recalls in its force and subtlety of rendering the matchless prose version of the friend whose Titanic labour in the 'giant's field' of Shakespeare added a fresh lustre even to the name of his father, and to whose memory Auguste Vacquerie has in his present book paid the tribute of a brother now three times bereft. Time and space forbid me here to take note of so much as a tithe of the high qualities which mark his other poems; to dwell on their wit, fancy, tenderness, energy, their free and various forces and universal spirit of life. Never was critical poetry more fine of edge, more bright and keen in swordplay, than in the lyrical interludes of satire and praise; never were songs of love or sorrow more tender or fiery than here. The very crown and jewel of the whole book is to my thinking the splendid and ardent poem beginning

Oh! quand, du bord du bois où, dans l'épais feuillage—

More perfect passion was never molten into more burning melody; no finer cast of the very form and feature of supreme desire was ever taken in words, or came forth more full and faultless in mould from the inmost furnace of sense and song, fed with memories and fancies as rich as the materials flung into Cellini's when he cast the Perseus with as masterly and as fervent a hand. And of the poems laid as funeral flowers on unforgotten graves—on that one above all made imperishable in all memories for ever, which hides

the two lovely and undivided lives whose union allied the name of this poet to that of his mighty master in song—what more and what less than this can be said? that even after the fourth book of the *Contemplations* we may read them with no subsidence of sorrowful and sublime delight in the power of poetry to sharpen at once and soften the keenest edge of sympathy by possession at once and exaltation of the spirit.

That such a man should have written such a book as he has here given us is of itself a commentary of sufficient significance on the doctrine which would warn off all poets from the ground of practical service to the state. The 'high heart which took up the challenge of destiny,'

Trouvant la chute belle et le malheur propice,

beats here and burns through every line; and those immortal words of high and fatherly acknowledgment which saluted the dawn of a long and voluntary exile, so nobly shared and sustained, may now be read once more with the sense of a fresh interest and meaning in them. Another instalment has been paid of the great debt due from a faithful son to the mother-land; a debt more vast than was exacted of her by the full-blown rapacity of a conqueror, but paid as readily to a creditor how different from hers! There is not a page of this book inapt to serve as a weapon of attack or defence against her inner and most deadly foes; not a word which carries with it no weight of strenuous and helpful service. Next time it should be the poet's turn to speak, and reiterate once more the perfect and full disproof of the fallacy which would divide by an im-

passable frontier his office from the patriot's. We have in our hands a noble present proof how true and good a patriot may be found and honoured in the poet; and though assuredly we need no further evidence on the part of Auguste Vacquerie, yet we trust before long to receive fresh confirmation of the certitude, how true and high a poet may survive and be crowned in the patriot.

AUGUSTE VACQUERIE.

FORMOSA,
1883.

THERE is nothing which makes us so keenly realize the unapproachable greatness of the author of *Othello* as the recollection of the fact that the author of *The Duchess of Malfy* was not the greatest tragic poet of his generation. There is nothing which brings so vividly before us the unapproachable greatness of the author of *Ruy Blas* as the recognition of the fact that there is yet among us a greater tragic poet than the author of *Formosa*. We know nothing of any personal relation between Shakespeare and Webster; but the spiritual relation between the genius of the one poet and the genius of the other has some evident and important points in common with that between Victor Hugo and the most illustrious of all his admirers and disciples. Auguste Vacquerie has always shown, by the practical evidence of his workmanship, the sincerity of his expressed conviction—'Qu'on n'imitait Hugo qu'en ne l'imitant pas'; and Webster in like manner proved himself a disciple of Shakespeare by abstinence from such reproduction of his manner as we find, for instance, in the two tragedies of the younger Hemings, a playwright of real but servile talent. In original force and mastery,

in terse and trenchant concision of style, in flashes of pathos and bursts of rolling music, the voice and hand of Vacquerie recall the voice and hand of Webster; but there is more sunlight in the world of his creation, more variety in the magic of his touch. He too might have been, had it pleased him, 'the most tragic of poets' in his time; we may doubt whether Webster, had it pleased him, could have been otherwise. But, difficult as it naturally may be for men to recognize that high original genius is compatible with astonishing variety of energies and flexibility of powers, it must ultimately prove impossible that the distinction of Vacquerie's position as a journalist, his eminence as a critic, his services as a politician and his honours as a patriot, should be allowed to eclipse the greatness of his quality as a poet. No man but Victor Hugo has shown himself greater, if so great, since the days of the Greek dramatists, at once in lyric and in tragic verse. For the great dramatists of England never tried their wings in lyric poetry except for the shortest of possible flights: and the first of English lyrists made his mark but once in tragedy; for *Hellas* and *Prometheus Unbound* have little other than a lyrical existence, lying almost as far outside the pale of Æschylean as of Shakesperean drama. But Vacquerie, eminent and triumphant alike in fantastic and in realistic studies, in the severest line of tragedy and the most romantic form of comedy, has shown by many a memorable instance his right to claim a high station in the front rank of living lyrists. Students of the future will surely find it hard to realize that this illustrious and high-souled poet was also the most brilliant and the most indefatigable of journalists

and critics, political and literary; the swiftest, strongest, gracefullest of swordsmen in the daily strife of so many glorious years.

It is well known that the poem which has recently added another flower to the many-coloured crown of his fame belongs by date of birth to that most glorious period of a most noble life, when its author was the companion, in exile and in honour, of the master to whom all that life has been as loyal as to the faith and principle accepted and obeyed by both with equal perfection of loyalty. For many years this lofty and pathetic work has awaited the time of triumph which has come for it at last amid the unanimous applause of the one great city in which art and poetry are held in as high honour and esteemed as worthy of rational interest as any passing matter of practical politics.

But a poem of such an order appeals not only to the audience of one city, to the readers of one country, though that city be Paris and that country France; it is born with wings to pass all frontiers, with a voice to reach all hearts; if not amenable to foreign judgment, it is no whit the less appreciable by foreign admiration. The liberties taken with English history are perhaps a little graver than those allowed himself by Shakespeare, certainly a little lighter than those allowed himself by Hugo. The invention of an imaginary third claimant to the throne at the moment of the final grapple for life between the Houses of York and Lancaster would scarcely have seemed permissible to an English poet; but the ingenuity and plausibility with which this contrivance is managed might well be held of themselves to justify a licence which is more than justified by the

magnificent effect and impression of the results attained. The high figure of the king-maker Warwick stands out in more lifelike and decisive relief than was given to it by Shakespeare or Marlowe. No more superb contrast was ever shown on the stage than here between his lofty chivalry and the abject egotism of the patronized pretender; no lovelier distinction was ever drawn by a poet's loving imagination than that which sets off against each other the graver and the more girlish heroine. That sympathy with all noble emotion which informs the whole work of Auguste Vacquerie finds most vivid and impressive illustration in the fact that three characters out of the four on which the action of this play depends are very types of heroism or sweetness. No dramatic or other poem has ever given us two fairer figures in finer contrast than those of the rival friends. Fletcher, of all our dramatists the most addicted to such effects, has never achieved in this his favourite line of study so beautiful and brilliant a success. Such a triumph of tragic art as the further contrast between the treasonous duke and the chivalrous king-maker lies yet further beyond comparison with any similar attempt of the same poet. To find a parallel for this we must look higher than all other moderns; we must turn once again to the types of Eviradnus and of Ratbert.

The superb and subtle simplicity of structure, the solid and vivid harmony of verse, it would need a hand as skilful and as strong as the poet's to describe or commend aright. Such universal applause has already acclaimed, in the great fourth scene of the third act, one of the most original, most subtle, and most passionate triumphs of dramatic poetry, that one voice more in the

chorus of praise can be worth little save in evidence of gratitude and goodwill. But it may be remarked that in this play the noblest parts are given to the women by a poet who, in *Jean Baudry* and *Les Funérailles de l'Honneur*, has given to his male actors the loftiest duties to discharge in the cause of honour and self-sacrifice. Satire or sentiment might suggest that this explains or is explained by the fact of its being written in verse; a fact to be thankfully and rejoicingly accepted by those who can hardly bring themselves to admit that even the prose of *Marie Tudor* is quite worth the verse of *Marion de Lorme*, and to whom on the same account *Tragaldabas* yields even more pleasure than *Le Fils*. In any case, such readers may be permitted to congratulate themselves that the higher and more natural form of tragic expression has been chosen for a play which contains two such types of womanhood. In the year 1820, Shelley, desiring to pay the highest possible compliment, said of a friend that she was 'like one of Shakespeare's women'; in 1883 he might have said, like one of Vacquerie's.

MARY QUEEN OF SCOTS.

MARY Queen of Scots, daughter of King James V. and his wife Mary of Lorraine, was born in December 1542, a few days before the death of her father, heart-broken by the disgrace of his arms at Solway Moss, where the disaffected nobles had declined to encounter an enemy of inferior force in the cause of a king whose systematic policy had been directed against the privileges of their order, and whose representative on the occasion was an unpopular favourite appointed general in defiance of their ill-will. On September 9 following the ceremony of coronation was duly performed upon the infant. A scheme for her betrothal to Edward Prince of Wales was defeated by the grasping greed of his father, whose obvious ambition to annex the crown of Scotland at once to that of England aroused instantly the general suspicion and indignation of Scottish patriotism. In 1548 the queen of six years old was betrothed to the dauphin Francis, and set sail for France, where she arrived on August 15. The society in which the child was thenceforward reared is known to readers of Brantôme as well as that of imperial Rome at its worst is known to readers of Suetonius or Petronius,—as well as that of papal Rome at its worst is known to readers of the diary kept by the

domestic chaplain of Pope Alexander VI. Only in their pages can a parallel be found to the gay and easy record which reveals without sign of shame or suspicion of offence the daily life of a court compared to which the court of King Charles II. is as the court of Queen Victoria to the society described by Grammont. Debauchery of all kinds and murder in all forms were the daily subjects of excitement or of jest to the brilliant circle which revolved around Queen Catherine de' Medici. After ten years' training under the tutelage of the woman whose main instrument of policy was the corruption of her own children, the queen of Scots, aged fifteen years and five months, was married to the eldest and feeblest of the brood on April 24, 1558. On November 17, Elizabeth became queen of England, and the princes of Lorraine—Francis the great duke of Guise and his brother the cardinal—induced their niece and her husband to assume, in addition to the arms of France and Scotland, the arms of a country over which they asserted the right of Mary Stuart to reign as legitimate heiress of Mary Tudor. Civil strife broke out in Scotland between John Knox and the queen dowager—between the self-styled 'congregation of the Lord' and the adherents of the regent, whose French troops repelled the combined forces of the Scotch and their English allies from the beleaguered walls of Leith, little more than a month before the death of their mistress in the castle of Edinburgh, on June 10, 1560. On August 25 Protestantism was proclaimed and Catholicism suppressed in Scotland by a convention of states assembled without the assent of the absent queen. On December 5, Francis the Second died; in August 1561 his widow left

France for Scotland, having been refused a safe-conduct by Elizabeth on the ground of her own previous refusal to ratify the treaty made with England by her commissioners in the same month of the preceding year. She arrived nevertheless in safety at Leith, escorted by three of her uncles of the house of Lorraine, and bringing in her train her future biographer, Brantôme, and Chastelard, the first of all her voluntary victims. On August 21 she first met the only man able to withstand her; and their first passage of arms left, as he has recorded, upon the mind of John Knox an ineffaceable impression of her 'proud mind, crafty wit, and indurate heart against God and his truth.' And yet her acts of concession and conciliation were such as no fanatic on the opposite side could have approved. She assented, not only to the undisturbed maintenance of the new creed, but even to a scheme for the endowment of the Protestant ministry out of the confiscated lands of the Church. Her half-brother, Lord James Stuart, shared the duties of her chief counsellor with William Maitland of Lethington, the keenest and most liberal thinker in the country. By the influence of Lord James, in spite of the earnest opposition of Knox, permission was obtained for her to hear mass celebrated in her private chapel—a licence to which, said the Reformer, he would have preferred the invasion of ten thousand Frenchmen. Through all the first troubles of her reign the young queen steered her skilful and dauntless way with the tact of a woman and the courage of a man. An insurrection in the north, headed by the earl of Huntly under pretext of rescuing from justice the life which his son had forfeited by his share in a homicidal brawl, was crushed at a blow by the Lord James, against

whose life, as well as against his sister's liberty, the conspiracy of the Gordons had been aimed, and on whom, after the father had fallen in fight and the son had expiated his double offence on the scaffold, the leading rebel's earldom of Murray was conferred by the gratitude of the queen. Exactly four months after the battle of Corrichie, and the subsequent execution of a criminal whom she is said to have 'loved entirely,' had put an end to the first insurrection raised against her, Pierre de Boscosel de Chastelard, who had returned to France with the other companions of her arrival and in November 1562 had revisited Scotland, expiated with his head the offence or the misfortune of a second detection at night in her bed-chamber. In the same month, twenty-five years afterwards, the execution of his mistress, according to the verdict of her contemporaries in France, avenged the blood of a lover who had died without uttering a word to realize the apprehension which (according to Knox) had before his trial impelled her to desire her brother 'that, as he loved her, he would slay Chastelard, and let him never speak word.' And in the same month, two years from the date of Chastelard's execution, her first step was unconsciously taken on the road to Fotheringay, when she gave her heart at first sight to her kinsman Henry Lord Darnley, son of Matthew Stuart, earl of Lennox, who had suffered an exile of twenty years in expiation of his intrigues with England, and had married the niece of King Henry the Eighth, daughter of his sister Margaret, the widow of James the Fourth, by her second husband, the earl of Angus. Queen Elizabeth, with the almost incredible want of tact or instinctive delicacy

which distinguished and disfigured her vigorous intelligence, had recently proposed as a suitor to the queen of Scots her own low-born favourite, Lord Robert Dudley, the widower if not the murderer of Amy Robsart; and she now protested against the project of marriage between Mary and Darnley. Mary, who had already married her kinsman in secret at Stirling Castle with Catholic rites celebrated in the apartment of David Rizzio, her secretary for correspondence with France, assured the English ambassador, in reply to the protest of his mistress, that the marriage would not take place for three months, when a dispensation from the Pope would allow the cousins to be publicly united without offence to the Church. On July 29, 1565, they were accordingly remarried at Holyrood. The hapless and worthless bridegroom had already incurred the hatred of two powerful enemies, the earls of Morton and Glencairn; but the former of these took part with the queen against the forces raised by Murray, Glencairn, and others, under the nominal leadership of Hamilton, duke of Chatelherault, on the double plea of danger to the new religion of the country, and of the illegal proceeding by which Darnley had been proclaimed king of Scots without the needful constitutional assent of the estates of the realm. Murray was cited to attend the 'raid' or array levied by the king and queen, and was duly denounced by public blast of trumpet for his non-appearance. He entered Edinburgh with his forces, but failed to hold the town against the guns of the castle, and fell back upon Dumfries before the advance of the royal army, which was now joined by James Hepburn, earl of Bothwell, on his

return from a three years' outlawed exile in France. He had been accused in 1562 of a plot to seize the queen and put her into the keeping of the earl of Arran, whose pretentions to her hand ended only when his insanity could no longer be concealed. Another new adherent was the son of the late earl of Huntly, to whom the forfeited honours of his house were restored a few months before the marriage of his sister to Bothwell. The queen now appealed to France for aid; but Castelnau, the French ambassador, replied to her passionate pleading by sober and earnest advice to make peace with the malcontents. This counsel was rejected, and in October 1565 the queen marched an army of 18,000 men against them from Edinburgh; their forces dispersed in face of superior numbers, and Murray, on seeking shelter in England, was received with contumely by Elizabeth, whose half-hearted help had failed to support his enterprise, and whose intercession for his return found at first no favour with the queen of Scots. But the conduct of the besotted boy on whom at their marriage she had bestowed the title of king began at once to justify the enterprise and to play into the hands of all his enemies alike. His father set him on to demand the crown matrimonial, which would at least have assured to him the rank and station of independent royalty for life. Rizzio, hitherto his friend and advocate, induced the queen to reply by a reasonable refusal to this hazardous and audacious request. Darnley at once threw himself into the arms of the party opposed to the policy of the queen and her secretary—a policy which at that moment was doubly and trebly calculated to exasperate the fears of the religious and the pride of

the patriotic. Mary was invited if not induced by the king of Spain to join his league for the suppression of Protestantism; while the actual or prospective endowment of Rizzio with Morton's office of chancellor, and the projected attainder of Murray and his allies, combined to inflame at once the anger and the apprehension of the Protestant nobles. According to one account, Darnley privately assured his uncle George Douglas of his wife's infidelity; he had himself, if he might be believed, discovered the secretary in the queen's apartment at midnight, under circumstances yet more unequivocally compromising than those which had brought Chastelard to the scaffold. Another version of the pitiful history represents Douglas as infusing suspicion of Rizzio into the empty mind of his nephew, and thus winning his consent to a deed already designed by others. A bond was drawn in which Darnley pledged himself to support the confederates who undertook to punish 'certain privy persons' offensive to the state, 'especially a stranger Italian called Davie;' another was subscribed by Darnley and the banished lords, then biding their time in Newcastle, which engaged him to procure their pardon and restoration, while pledging them to ensure to him the enjoyment of the title he coveted, with the consequent security of an undisputed succession to the crown, despite the counter claims of the house of Hamilton, in case his wife should die without issue—a result which, intentionally or not, he and his fellow conspirators did all that brutality could have suggested to accelerate and secure. On March 9, the palace of Holyrood was invested by a troop under the command of Morton, while Rizzio was dragged by

force out of the queen's presence and slain without trial in the heat of the moment. The parliament was discharged by proclamation issued in the name of Darnley as king; and in the evening of the next day the banished lords, whom it was to have condemned to outlawry, returned to Edinburgh. On the day following they were graciously received by the queen, who undertook to sign a bond for their security, but delayed the subscription till next morning under plea of sickness. During the night she escaped with Darnley, whom she had already seduced from the party of his accomplices, and arrived at Dunbar on the third morning after the slaughter of her favourite. From thence they returned to Edinburgh on March 28, guarded by 2,000 horsemen under the command of Bothwell, who had escaped from Holyrood on the night of the murder, to raise a force on the queen's behalf with his usual soldierly promptitude. The slayers of Rizzio fled to England, and were outlawed; Darnley was permitted to protest his innocence and denounce his accomplices; after which he became the scorn of all parties alike, and few men dared or cared to be seen in his company. On June 19, a son was born to his wife, and in the face of his previous protestations he was induced to acknowledge himself the father. But, as Murray and his partisans returned to favour and influence no longer incompatible with that of Bothwell and Huntly, he grew desperate enough with terror to dream of escape to France. This design was at once frustrated by the queen's resolution. She summoned him to declare his reasons for it in presence of the French ambassador and an assembly of the nobles; she besought him for God's sake to speak out,

and not spare her ; and at last he left her presence with an avowal that he had nothing to allege. The favour shown to Bothwell had not yet given occasion for scandal, though his character as an adventurous libertine was as notable as his reputation for military hardihood ; but as the summer advanced his insolence increased with his influence at court and the general aversion of his rivals. He was richly endowed by Mary from the greater and lesser spoils of the Church ; and the three wardenships of the border, united for the first time in his person, gave the lord high admiral of Scotland a position of unequalled power. In the gallant discharge of its duties he was dangerously wounded by a leading outlaw, whom he slew in single combat ; and while yet confined to Hermitage Castle he received a visit of two hours from the queen, who rode thither from Jedburgh and back through twenty miles of the wild borderland, where her person was in perpetual danger from the freebooters whom her father's policy had striven and had failed to extirpate. The result of this daring ride was a ten days' fever, after which she removed by short stages to Craigmillar, where a proposal for her divorce from Darnley was laid before her by Bothwell, Murray, Huntly, Argyle, and Lethington, who was chosen spokesman for the rest. She assented on condition that the divorce could be lawfully effected without impeachment of her son's legitimacy ; whereupon Lethington undertook in the name of all present that she should be rid of her husband without any prejudice to the child—at whose baptism a few days afterwards Bothwell took the place of the putative father, though Darnley was actually residing under the same

roof, and it was not till after the ceremony that he was suddenly struck down by a sickness so violent as to excite suspicions of poison. He was removed to Glasgow, and left for the time in charge of his father; but on the news of his progress towards recovery a bond was drawn up for execution of the sentence of death which had secretly been pronounced against the twice-turned traitor who had earned his doom at all hands alike. On the 22nd of the next month (January 1567) the queen visited her husband at Glasgow and proposed to remove him to Craigmillar Castle, where he would have the benefit of medicinal baths; but instead of this resort he was conveyed on the last day of the month to the lonely and squalid shelter of the residence which was soon to be made memorable by his murder. Between the ruins of two sacred buildings, with the town-wall to the south and a suburban hamlet known to ill fame as the Thieves' Row to the north of it, a lodging was prepared for the titular king of Scotland, and fitted up with tapestries taken from the Gordons after the battle of Corrichie. On the evening of Sunday, February 9, Mary took her last leave of the miserable boy who had so often and so mortally outraged her as consort and as queen. That night the whole city was shaken out of sleep by an explosion of gunpowder which shattered to fragments the building in which he should have slept and perished; and next morning the bodies of Darnley and a page were found strangled in a garden adjoining it, whither they had apparently escaped over a wall, to be despatched by the hands of Bothwell's attendant confederates.

Upon the view which may be taken of Mary's

conduct during the next three months depends the whole debatable question of her character. According to the professed champions of that character, this conduct was a tissue of such dastardly imbecility, such heartless irresolution, and such brainless inconsistency, as for ever to dispose of her time-honoured claim to the credit of intelligence and courage. It is certain that just three months and six days after the murder of her husband she became the wife of her husband's murderer. On February 11 she wrote to the bishop of Glasgow, her ambassador in France, a brief letter of simple eloquence, announcing her providential escape from a design upon her own as well as her husband's life. A reward of two thousand pounds was offered by proclamation for discovery of the murderer. Bothwell and others, his satellites or the queen's, were instantly placarded by name as the criminals. Voices were heard by night in the streets of Edinburgh calling down judgment on the assassins. Four days after the discovery of the bodies, Darnley was buried in the chapel of Holyrood with secrecy as remarkable as the solemnity with which Rizzio had been interred there less than a year before. On the Sunday following, Mary left Edinburgh for Seton Palace, twelve miles from the capital, where scandal asserted that she passed the time merrily in shooting-matches with Bothwell for her partner against Lords Seton and Huntly; other accounts represent Huntly and Bothwell as left at Holyrood in charge of the infant prince. Gracefully and respectfully, with statesmanlike yet feminine dexterity, the demands of Darnley's father for justice on the murderers of his son were accepted and eluded by his daughter-in-law. Bothwell, with a troop

of fifty men, rode through Edinburgh defiantly denouncing vengeance on his concealed accusers. As weeks elapsed without action on the part of the royal widow, while the cry of blood was up throughout the country, raising echoes from England and abroad, the murmur of accusation began to rise against her also. Murray, with his sister's ready permission, withdrew to France. Already the report was abroad that the queen was bent on marriage with Bothwell, whose last year's marriage with the sister of Huntly would be dissolved, and the assent of his wife's brother purchased by the restitution of his forfeited estates. According to the *Memoirs* of Sir James Melville, both Lord Herries and himself resolved to appeal to the queen in terms of bold and earnest remonstrance against so desperate and scandalous a design; Herries, having been met with assurances of its unreality and professions of astonishment at the suggestion, instantly fled from court; Melville, evading the danger of a merely personal protest without backers to support him, laid before Mary a letter from a loyal Scot long resident in England, which urged upon her consideration and her conscience the danger and disgrace of such a project yet more freely than Herries had ventured to do by word of mouth; but the sole result was that it needed all the queen's courage and resolution to rescue him from the violence of the man for whom, she was reported to have said, she cared not if she lost France, England, and her own country, and would go with him to the world's end in a white petticoat before she would leave him. On March 28 the privy council, in which Bothwell himself sat, appointed April 12 as the day of his trial; Lennox, instead of the crown, being

named as the accuser, and cited by royal letters to appear at 'the humble request and petition of the said Earl Bothwell,' who on the day of the trial had 4,000 armed men behind him in the streets, while the castle was also at his command. Under these arrangements it was not thought wonderful that Lennox discreetly declined the danger of attendance, even with 3,000 men ready to follow him, at the risk of desperate street fighting. He pleaded sickness, asked for more time, and demanded that the accused, instead of enjoying special favour, should share the treatment of other suspected criminals. But as no particle of evidence on his side was advanced, the protest of his representative was rejected, and Bothwell, acquitted in default of witnesses against him, was free to challenge any persistent accuser to the ancient ordeal of battle. His wealth and power were enlarged by gift of the parliament which met on the 14th and rose on the 19th of April,—a date made notable by the subsequent supper at Ainslie's tavern, where Bothwell obtained the signatures of its leading members to a document affirming his innocence, and pledging the subscribers to maintain it against all challengers, to stand by him in all his quarrels, and finally to promote by all means in their power the marriage by which they recommended the queen to reward his services and benefit the country. On the second day following Mary went to visit her child at Stirling, where his guardian, the earl of Mar, refused to admit more than two women in her train. It was well known in Edinburgh that Bothwell had a body of men ready to intercept her on the way back, and carry her to Dunbar—not, as was

naturally inferred, without good assurance of her consent. On April 24, as she approached Edinburgh, Bothwell accordingly met her at the head of 800 spearmen, assured her (as she afterwards averred) that she was in the utmost peril, and escorted her, together with Huntly, Lethington, and Melville, who were then in attendance, to Dunbar Castle. On May 3, Lady Jane Gordon, who had become countess of Bothwell on February 22 of the year preceding, obtained, on the ground of her husband's infidelities, a separation which, however, would not under the old laws of Catholic Scotland have left him free to marry again; on the 7th, accordingly, the necessary divorce was pronounced, after two days' session, by a clerical tribunal which ten days before had received from the queen a special commission to give judgment on a plea of somewhat apocryphal consanguinity alleged by Bothwell as the ground of an action for divorce against his wife. The fact was studiously evaded or concealed that a dispensation had been granted by the archbishop of St. Andrews for this irregularity, which could only have arisen through some illicit connection of the husband with a relative of the wife between whom and himself no affinity by blood or marriage could be proved. On the day when the first or Protestant divorce was pronounced, Mary and Bothwell returned to Edinburgh with every prepared appearance of a peaceful triumph. Lest her captivity should have been held to invalidate the late legal proceedings in her name, proclamation was made of forgiveness accorded by the queen to her captor in consideration of his past and future services, and her intention was announced to reward them by further pro-

motion; and on the same day (May 12) he was duly created duke of Orkney and Shetland. The duke, as a conscientious Protestant, refused to marry his mistress according to the rites of her church; and she, the chosen champion of its cause, agreed to be married to him, not merely by a Protestant, but by one who before his conversion had been a Catholic bishop, and should therefore have been more hateful and contemptible in her eyes than any ordinary heretic, had not religion as well as policy, faith as well as reason, been absorbed or superseded by some more mastering passion or emotion. This passion or emotion, according to those who deny her attachment to Bothwell, was simply terror—the blind and irrational prostration of an abject spirit before the cruel force of circumstances and the crafty wickedness of men. Hitherto, according to all evidence, she had shown herself on all occasions, as on all subsequent occasions she indisputably showed herself, the most fearless, the most keen-sighted, the most ready-witted, the most high-gifted and high-spirited of women; gallant and generous, skilful and practical, never to be cowed by fortune, never to be cajoled by craft; neither more unselfish in her ends nor more unscrupulous in her practice than might have been expected from her training and her creed. But at the crowning moment of trial there are those who assert their belief that the woman who on her way to the field of Corrichie had uttered her wish to be a man, that she might know all the hardship and all the enjoyment of a soldier's life, riding forth 'in jack and knapscull'—the woman who long afterwards was to hold her own for two days together without help of counsel against all the array of English law and

English statesmanship, armed with irrefragable evidence and supported by the resentment of a nation—showed herself equally devoid of moral and of physical resolution; too senseless to realize the significance and too heartless to face the danger of a situation from which the simplest exercise of reason, principle, or courage must have rescued the most unsuspicious and inexperienced of honest women who was not helplessly deficient in self-reliance and self-respect. The famous correspondence produced next year in evidence against her at the conference of York may have been, as her partisans affirm, so craftily garbled and falsified by interpolation, suppression, perversion, or absolute forgery, as to be all but historically worthless. Its acceptance or its rejection does not in any degree whatever affect, for better or for worse, the rational estimate of her character. The problem presented by the simple existence of the facts just summed up remains in either case absolutely the same.

That the coarse and imperious nature of the hardy and able ruffian who had now become openly her master should no less openly have shown itself even in the first moments of their inauspicious union is what any bystander of common insight must inevitably have foreseen. Tears, dejection, and passionate expressions of a despair 'wishing only for death,' bore fitful and variable witness to her first sense of a heavier yoke than yet had galled her spirit and her pride. At other times her affectionate gaiety would give evidence as trustworthy of a fearless and improvident satisfaction. They rode out in state together, and if he kept cap in hand as a subject she would snatch it from him and clap it on his head again; while in graver things she took all due or

possible care to gratify his ambition, by the insertion of a clause in their contract of marriage which made their joint signature necessary to all documents of state issued under the sign-manual. She despatched to France a special envoy, the bishop of Dumblane, with instructions setting forth at length the unparalleled and hitherto ill-requited services and merits of Bothwell, and the necessity of compliance at once with his passion and with the unanimous counsel of the nation,—a people who would endure the rule of no foreign consort, and whom none of their own countrymen were so competent to control, alike by wisdom and by valour, as the incomparable subject of her choice. These personal merits and this political necessity were the only pleas advanced in a letter to her ambassador in England. But that neither plea would avail her for a moment in Scotland she had ominous evidence on the thirteenth day after her marriage, when no response was made to the usual form of proclamation for a raid or levy of forces under pretext of a campaign against the reivers of the border. On the 6th or 7th of June Mary and Bothwell took refuge in Borthwick Castle, twelve miles from the capital, where the fortress was in the keeping of an adherent whom the diplomacy of Sir James Melville had succeeded in detaching from his allegiance to Bothwell. The fugitives were pursued and beleaguered by the earl of Morton and Lord Hume, who declared their purpose to rescue the queen from the thraldom of her husband. He escaped, leaving her free to follow him or to join the party of her professed deliverers. But whatever cause she might have found since marriage to complain of his rigorous custody and domineering brutality was insuffi-

cient to break the ties by which he held her. Alone, in the disguise of a page, she slipped out of the castle at midnight, and rode off to meet him at a tower two miles distant, whence they fled together to Dunbar. The confederate lords on entering Edinburgh were welcomed by the citizens, and after three hours' persuasion Lethington, who had now joined them, prevailed on the captain of the castle to deliver it also into their hands. Proclamations were issued in which the crime of Bothwell was denounced, and the disgrace of the country, the thraldom of the queen, and the mortal peril of her infant son were set forth as reasons for summoning all the lieges of the chief cities of Scotland to rise in arms on three hours' notice and join the forces assembled against the one common enemy. News of his approach reached them on the night of June 14, and they marched before dawn with 2,200 men to meet him near Musselburgh. Mary meanwhile had passed from Dunbar to Haddington, and thence to Seton, where 1,600 men rallied to her side. On June 15, one month from their marriage day, the queen and Bothwell, at the head of a force of fairly equal numbers but visibly inferior discipline, met the army of the confederates at Carberry Hill, some six miles from Edinburgh. Du Croc, the French ambassador, obtained permission through the influence of Maitland to convey to the queen the terms proposed by their leaders,—that she and Bothwell should part, or that he should meet in single combat a champion chosen from among their number. Bothwell offered to meet any man of sufficient quality ; Mary would not assent. As the afternoon wore on their force began to melt away by desertion and to break up for lack of discipline.

Again the trial by single combat was proposed, and thrice the proposal fell through, owing to objections on this side or on that. At last it was agreed that the queen should yield herself prisoner, and Bothwell be allowed to retire in safety to Dunbar with the few followers who remained to him. Mary took leave of her first and last master with passionate anguish and many parting kisses; but in face of his enemies, and in hearing of the cries which burst from the ranks, demanding her death by fire as a murderess and harlot, the whole heroic and passionate spirit of the woman represented by her admirers as a spiritless imbecile flamed out in responsive threats to have all the men hanged and crucified, in whose power she now stood helpless and alone. She grasped the hand of Lord Lindsay as he rode beside her, and swore 'by this hand' she would 'have his head for this.' In Edinburgh she was received by a yelling mob, which flaunted before her at each turn a banner representing the corpse of Darnley with her child beside it invoking on his knees the retribution of Divine justice. From the violence of a multitude in which women of the worst class were more furious than the men she was sheltered in the house of the provost, where she repeatedly showed herself at the window, appealing aloud with dishevelled hair and dress to the mercy which no man could look upon her and refuse. At nine in the evening she was removed to Holyrood, and thence to the port of Leith, where she embarked under guard, with her attendants, for the island castle of Lochleven. On the 20th a silver casket containing letters and French verses, miscalled sonnets, in the handwriting of the queen, was taken from the person

of a servant who had been sent by Bothwell to bring it from Edinburgh to Dunbar. Even in the existing versions of the letters, translated from the lost originals and retranslated from this translation of a text which was probably destroyed in 1603 by order of King James on his accession to the English throne,—even in these possibly disfigured versions, the fiery pathos of passion, the fierce and piteous fluctuations of spirit between love and hate, hope and rage and jealousy, have an eloquence apparently beyond the imitation or invention of art. Three days after this discovery Lord Lindsay, Lord Ruthven, and Sir Robert Melville were despatched to Lochleven, there to obtain the queen's signature to an act of abdication in favour of her son, and another appointing Murray regent during his minority. She submitted, and a commission of regency was established till the return from France of Murray, who, on August 15, arrived at Lochleven with Morton and Athole. According to his own account, the expostulations as to her past conduct which preceded his admonitions for the future were received with tears, confessions, and attempts at extenuation or excuse; but when they parted next day on good terms she had regained her usual spirits. Nor from that day forward had they reason to sink again, in spite of the close keeping in which she was held, with the daughters of the house for bedfellows. Their mother and the regent's, her father's former mistress, was herself not impervious to her prisoner's lifelong power of seduction and subjugation. Her son George Douglas fell inevitably under the charm. A rumour transmitted to England went so far as to assert that she had proposed him to their

common half-brother Murray as a fourth husband for herself; a later tradition represented her as the mother of a child by him. A third report, at least as improbable as either, asserted that a daughter of Mary and Bothwell, born about this time, lived to be a nun in France. It is certain that the necessary removal of George Douglas from Lochleven enabled him to devise a method of escape for the prisoner on March 25, 1568, which was frustrated by detection of her white hands under the disguise of a laundress. But a younger member of the household, Willie Douglas, aged eighteen, whose devotion was afterwards remembered and his safety cared for by Mary at a time of utmost risk and perplexity to herself, succeeded on May 2 in assisting her to escape by a postern gate to the lake-side, and thence in a boat to the mainland, where George Douglas, Lord Seton, and others were awaiting her. Thence they rode to Seton's castle of Niddry, and next day to Hamilton Palace, round which an army of 6,000 men was soon assembled, and whither the new French ambassador to Scotland hastened to pay his duty. The queen's abdication was revoked, messengers were despatched to the English and French courts, and word was sent to Murray at Glasgow that he must resign the regency, and should be pardoned in common with all offenders against the queen. But on the day when Mary arrived at Hamilton Murray had summoned to Glasgow the feudatories of the crown, to take arms against the insurgent enemies of the infant king. Elizabeth sent conditional offers of help to her kinswoman, provided she would accept of English intervention and abstain from seeking foreign assistance;

but the messenger came too late. Mary's followers had failed to retake Dunbar Castle from the regent, and made for Dumbarton instead, marching two miles south of Glasgow, by the village of Langside. Here Murray with 4,500 men, under leaders of high distinction, met the 6,000 of the queen's army, whose ablest man, Herries, was as much distrusted by Mary as by every one else, while the Hamiltons could only be trusted to think of their own interests, and were suspected of treasonable designs on all who stood between their house and the monarchy. On May 13, the battle or skirmish of Langside determined the result of the campaign in three quarters of an hour. Kirkaldy of Grange, who commanded the regent's cavalry, seized and kept the place of vantage from the beginning, and at the first sign of wavering on the other side shattered at a single charge the forces of the queen, with a loss of one man to three hundred. Mary fled sixty miles from the field of her last battle before she halted at Sanquhar, and for three days of flight, according to her own account, had to sleep on the hard ground, live on oatmeal and sour milk, and fare at night like the owls, in hunger, cold, and fear. On the third day from the rout of Langside she crossed the Solway, and landed at Workington in Cumberland, May 16, 1568. On the 20th Lord Scrope and Sir Francis Knollys were sent from court to carry messages and letters of comfort from Elizabeth to Mary at Carlisle. On June 11 Knollys wrote to Cecil at once the best description and the noblest panegyric extant of the queen of Scots—enlarging, with a brave man's sympathy, on her indifference to form and ceremony, her daring grace and openness

of manner, her frank display of a great desire to be avenged of her enemies, her readiness to expose herself to all perils in hope of victory, her delight to hear of hardihood and courage, commending by name all her enemies of approved valour, sparing no cowardice in her friends, but above all things athirst for victory by any means at any price, so that for its sake pain and peril seemed pleasant to her, and wealth and all things, if compared with it, contemptible and vile. What was to be done with such a princess, whether she were to be nourished in one's bosom, above all whether it could be advisable or safe to try any diplomatic tricks upon such a lady, Knollys left for the minister to judge. It is remarkable that he should not have discovered in her the qualities so obvious to modern champions of her character—easiness, gullibility, incurable innocence and invincible ignorance of evil, incapacity to suspect or resent anything, readiness to believe and forgive all things. On July 15, after various delays interposed by her reluctance to leave the neighbourhood of the border, where on her arrival she had received the welcome and the homage of the leading Catholic houses of Northumberland and Cumberland, she was removed to Bolton Castle in North Yorkshire. During her residence here a conference was held at York between her own and Elizabeth's commissioners and those appointed to represent her son as king of Scots. These latter, of whom Murray himself was the chief, privately laid before the English commissioners the contents of the famous casket. On October 24 the place of the conference was shifted from York to London, where the inquiry was to be held before Queen Elizabeth in council. Mary

was already aware that the chief of the English commissioners, the duke of Norfolk, was secretly an aspirant to the peril of her hand; and on October 21 she gave the first sign of assent to the suggestion of a divorce from Bothwell. On October 26 the charge of complicity in the murder of Darnley was distinctly brought forward against her in spite of Norfolk's reluctance and Murray's previous hesitation. Elizabeth, by the mouth of her chief justice, formally rebuked the audacity of the subjects who durst bring such a charge against their sovereign, and challenged them to advance their proofs. They complied by the production of an indictment under five heads, supported by the necessary evidence of documents. The number of English commissioners was increased, and they were bound to preserve secrecy as to the matters revealed. Further evidence was supplied by Thomas Crawford, a retainer of the house of Lennox, tallying so exactly with the text of the casket letters as to have been cited in proof that the latter must needs be a forgery. Elizabeth, on the close of the evidence, invited Mary to reply to the proofs alleged before she could be admitted to her presence; but Mary simply desired her commissioners to withdraw from the conference. She declined with scorn the proposal made by Elizabeth through Knollys, that she should sign a second abdication in favour of her son. On January 10, 1569, the judgment given at the conference acquitted Murray and his adherents of rebellion, while affirming that nothing had been proved against Mary—a verdict accepted by Murray as equivalent to a practical recognition of his office as regent for the infant king. This position he was not long to hold;

and the fierce exultation of Mary at the news of his murder gave to those who believed in her complicity with the murderer, on whom a pension was bestowed by her unblushing gratitude, fresh reason to fear, if her liberty of correspondence and intrigue were not restrained, the likelihood of a similar fate for Elizabeth. On January 26, 1569, she had been removed from Bolton Castle to Tutbury in Staffordshire, where proposals were conveyed to her, at the instigation of Leicester, for a marriage with the duke of Norfolk, to which she gave a graciously conditional assent; but the discovery of these proposals consigned Norfolk to the Tower, and on the outbreak of an insurrection in the north Mary, by Lord Hunsdon's advice, was again removed to Coventry, when a body of her intending deliverers was within a day's ride of Tutbury. On January 23 following Murray was assassinated; and a second northern insurrection was crushed in a single sharp fight by Lord Hunsdon. In October Cecil had an interview with Mary at Chatsworth, when the conditions of her possible restoration to the throne in compliance with French demands were debated at length. The queen of Scots, with dauntless dignity, refused to yield the castles of Edinburgh and Dumbarton into English keeping, or to deliver up her fugitive English partisans then in Scotland; upon other points they came to terms, and the articles were signed October 16. On the same day Mary wrote to Elizabeth, requesting with graceful earnestness the favour of an interview which might reassure her against the suggestion that this treaty was a mere pretence. On November 28 she was removed to Sheffield Castle, where she remained for the

next fourteen years in charge of the earl of Shrewsbury. The detection of a plot, in which Norfolk was implicated, for the invasion of England by Spain on behalf of Mary, who was then to take him as the fourth and most contemptible of her husbands, made necessary the reduction of her household and the stricter confinement of her person. On May 28, 1572, a demand from both houses of parliament for her execution as well as Norfolk's was generously rejected by Elizabeth; but after the punishment of the traitorous pretender to her hand, on whom she had lavished many eloquent letters of affectionate protestation, she fell into 'a passion of sickness' which convinced her honest keeper of her genuine grief for the ducal caitiff. A treaty projected on the news of the massacre of St. Bartholomew, by which Mary should be sent back to Scotland for immediate execution, was broken off by the death of the earl of Mar, who had succeeded Lennox as regent; nor was it found possible to come to acceptable terms on a like understanding with his successor Morton, who in 1577 sent a proposal to Mary for her restoration, which she declined, in suspicion of a plot laid to entrap her by the policy of Sir Francis Walsingham, the most unscrupulously patriotic of her English enemies, who four years afterwards sent word to Scotland that the execution of Morton, so long the ally of England, would be answered by the execution of Mary. But on that occasion Elizabeth again refused her assent either to the trial of Mary or to her transference from Sheffield to the Tower. In 1581 Mary accepted the advice of Catherine de' Medici and Henry III. that she should allow her son's title to reign as king of Scotland conjointly with herself

when released and restored to a share of the throne. This plan was but part of a scheme including the invasion of England by her kinsman the duke of Guise, who was to land in the north and raise a Scottish army to place the released prisoner of Sheffield beside her son on the throne of Elizabeth. After the overthrow of the Scottish accomplices in this notable project, Mary poured forth upon Elizabeth a torrent of pathetic and eloquent reproach for the many wrongs she had suffered at the hands of her hostess, and pledged her honour to the assurance that she now aspired to no kingdom but that of heaven. In the spring of 1583 she retained enough of this saintly resignation to ask for nothing but liberty, without a share in the government of Scotland; but Lord Burghley not unreasonably preferred, if feasible, to reconcile the alliance of her son with the detention of his mother. In 1584 the long-suffering earl of Shrewsbury was relieved of his fourteen years' charge through the involuntary good offices of his wife, whose daughter by her first husband had married a brother of Darnley; and their orphan child Arabella, born in England, of royal descent on the father's side, was now, in the hopeful view of her grandmother, a more plausible claimant than the king or queen of Scots to the inheritance of the English throne. In December 1583 Mary had laid before the French ambassador her first complaint of the slanders spread by Lady Shrewsbury and her sons, who were ultimately compelled to confess the falsehood of their imputations on the queen of Scots and her keeper. It was probably at the time when a desire for revenge on her calumniatress made her think the opportunity good and safe for discharge

of such a two-edged dart at the countess and the queen that Mary wrote, but abstained from despatching, the famous and terrible letter in which, with many gracious excuses and professions of regret and attachment, she transmits to Elizabeth a full and vivid report of the hideous gossip retailed by Bess of Hardwick regarding her character and person at a time when the reporter of these abominations was on friendly terms with her husband's royal charge. In the autumn of 1584 she was removed to Wingfield Manor under charge of Sir Ralph Sadler and John Somers, who accompanied her also on her next removal to Tutbury in January 1585. A letter received by her in that cold, dark, and unhealthy castle, of which fifteen years before she had made painful and malodorous experience, assured her that her son would acknowledge her only as queen-mother, and provoked at once the threat of a parent's curse and an application to Elizabeth for sympathy. In April 1585 Sir Amyas Paulet was appointed to the office of which Sadler, accused of careless indulgence, had requested to be relieved; and on Christmas Eve she was removed from the hateful shelter of Tutbury to the castle of Chartley in the same county. Her correspondence in cipher from thence with her English agents abroad, intercepted by Walsingham and deciphered by his secretary, gave eager encouragement to the design for a Spanish invasion of England under the prince of Parma —an enterprise in which she would do her utmost to make her son take part, and in case of his refusal would induce the Catholic nobles of Scotland to betray him into the hands of Philip, from whose tutelage he should be released only on her demand, or if after her death he

should wish to return, nor then unless he had become a Catholic. But even these patriotic and maternal schemes to consign her child and reconsign the kingdom to the keeping of the Inquisition, incarnate in the widower of Mary Tudor, were superseded by the attraction of a conspiracy against the throne and life of Elizabeth. Anthony Babington, in his boyhood a ward of Shrewsbury, resident in the household at Sheffield Castle, and thus subjected to the charm before which so many victims had already fallen, was now induced to undertake the deliverance of the queen of Scots by the murder of the queen of England. It is maintained by those admirers of Mary who assume her to have been an almost absolute imbecile, gifted with the power of imposing herself on the world as a woman of unsurpassed ability, that, while cognisant of the plot for her deliverance by English rebels and an invading army of foreign auxiliaries, she might have been innocently unconscious that this conspiracy involved the simultaneous assassination of Elizabeth. In the conduct and detection of her correspondence with Babington, traitor was played off against traitor, and spies were utilized against assassins, with as little scruple as could be required or expected in the diplomacy of the time. As in the case of the casket letters, it is alleged that forgery was employed to interpolate sufficient evidence of Mary's complicity in a design of which it is thought credible that she was kept in ignorance by the traitors and murderers who had enrolled themselves in her service,—that one who pensioned the actual murderer of Murray and a would-be murderer of Elizabeth was incapable of approving what her keen and practised intelligence was too

blunt and torpid to anticipate as inevitable and inseparable from the general design. In August the conspirators were netted, and Mary was arrested at the gate of Tixall Park, whither Paulet had taken her under pretence of a hunting party. At Tixall she was detained till her papers at Chartley had undergone thorough research. That she was at length taken in her own toils even such a dullard as her admirers depict her could not have failed to understand; that she was no such dastard as to desire or deserve such defenders the whole brief course of her remaining life bore consistent and irrefragable witness. Her first thought on her return to Chartley was one of loyal gratitude and womanly sympathy. She cheered the wife of her English secretary, now under arrest, with promises to answer for her husband to all accusations brought against him, took her new-born child from the mother's arms, and in default of clergy baptized it, to Paulet's Puritanic horror, with her own hands by her own name. The next or the twin-born impulse of her indomitable nature was, as usual in all times of danger, one of passionate and high-spirited defiance, on discovering the seizure of her papers. A fortnight afterwards her keys and her money were confiscated, while she, bedridden, and unable to move her hand, could only ply the terrible weapon of her bitter and fiery tongue. Her secretaries were examined in London, and one of them gave evidence that she had first heard of the conspiracy by letter from Babington, of whose design against the life of Elizabeth she thought it best to take no notice in her reply, though she did not hold herself bound to reveal it. On September 25 she was removed to the

strong castle of Fotheringay in Northamptonshire. On October 6 she was desired by letter from Elizabeth to answer the charges brought against her before certain of the chief English nobles appointed to sit in commission on the cause. In spite of her first refusal to submit, she was induced by the arguments of the vice-chamberlain, Sir Christopher Hatton, to appear before this tribunal on condition that her protest should be registered against the legality of its jurisdiction over a sovereign, the next heir of the English crown.

On October 14 and 15, 1586, the trial was held in the hall of Fotheringay Castle. Alone, 'without one counsellor on her side among so many,' Mary conducted the whole of her own defence with courage incomparable and unsurpassable ability. Pathos and indignation, subtlety and simplicity, personal appeal and political reasoning, were the alternate weapons with which she fought against all odds of evidence or inference, and disputed step by step every inch of debatable ground. She repeatedly insisted on the production of proof in her own handwriting as to her complicity with the project of the assassins who had expiated their crime on the 20th and 21st of the month preceding. When the charge was shifted to the question of her intrigues with Spain, she took her stand resolutely on her right to convey whatever right she possessed, though now no kingdom was left her for disposal, to whomsoever she might choose. One single slip she made in the whole course of her defence; but none could have been more unluckily characteristic and significant. When Burghley brought against her the unanswerable charge of having at that moment in her service, and in receipt of an annual pension, the instigator

of a previous attempt on the life of Elizabeth, she had the unwary audacity to cite in her justification the pensions allowed by Elizabeth to her adversaries in Scotland, and especially to her son. It is remarkable that just two months later, in a conversation with her keepers, she again made use of the same extraordinary argument in reply to the same inevitable imputation, and would not be brought to admit that the two cases were other than parallel. But except for this single instance of oversight or perversity her defence was throughout a masterpiece of indomitable ingenuity, of delicate and steadfast courage, of womanly dignity and genius. Finally she demanded, as she had demanded before, a trial either before the estates of the realm lawfully assembled, or else before the queen in council. So closed the second day of the trial ; and before the next day's work could begin a note of two or three lines hastily written at midnight informed the commissioners that Elizabeth had suddenly determined to adjourn the expected judgment and transfer the place of it to the star-chamber. Here, on October 25, the commissioners again met ; and one of them alone, Lord Zouch, dissented from the verdict by which Mary was found guilty of having, since June 1 preceding, compassed and imagined divers matters tending to the destruction of Elizabeth. This verdict was conveyed to her, about three weeks later, by Lord Buckhurst and Robert Beale, clerk of the privy council. At the intimation that her life was an impediment to the security of the received religion, 'she seemed with a certain unwonted alacrity to triumph, giving God thanks, and rejoicing in her heart that she was held to be an instrument' for the restoration of her

own faith. This note of exultation as in martyrdom was maintained with unflinching courage to the last. She wrote to Elizabeth and the duke of Guise two letters of almost matchless eloquence and pathos, admirable especially for their loyal and grateful remembrance of all her faithful servants. Between the date of these letters and the day of her execution wellnigh three months of suspense elapsed. Elizabeth, fearless almost to a fault in face of physical danger, constant in her confidence even after discovery of her narrow escape from the poisoned bullets of household conspirators, was cowardly even to a crime in face of subtler and more complicated peril. She rejected with resolute dignity the intercession of French envoys for the life of the queen-dowager of France ; she allowed the sentence of death to be proclaimed, and welcomed with bonfires and bell-ringing throughout the length of England ; she yielded a respite of twelve days to the pleading of the French ambassador, and had a charge trumped up against him of participation in a conspiracy against her life ; at length, on February 1, 1587, she signed the death warrant, and then made her secretaries write word to Paulet of her displeasure that in all this time he should not of himself have found out some way to shorten the life of his prisoner, as in duty bound by his oath, and thus relieve her singularly tender conscience from the guilt of bloodshed. Paulet, with loyal and regretful indignation, declined the disgrace proposed to him in a suggestion 'to shed blood without law or warrant' ; and on February 7 the earls of Shrewsbury and Kent arrived at Fotheringay with the commission of the council for execution of the sentence given against his

prisoner. Mary received the announcement with majestic tranquillity, expressing in dignified terms her readiness to die, her consciousness that she was a martyr for her religion, and her total ignorance of any conspiracy against the life of Elizabeth. At night she took a graceful and affectionate leave of her attendants, distributed among them her money and jewels, wrote out in full the various legacies to be conveyed by her will, and charged her apothecary Gorion with her last messages for the king of Spain. In these messages the whole nature of the woman was revealed. Not a single friend, not a single enemy, was forgotten ; the slightest service, the slightest wrong, had its place assigned in her faithful and implacable memory for retribution or reward. Forgiveness of injuries was as alien from her fierce and loyal spirit as forgetfulness of benefits ; the destruction of England and its liberties by Spanish invasion and conquest was the strongest aspiration of her parting soul. At eight next morning she entered the hall of execution, having taken leave of the weeping envoy from Scotland, to whom she gave a brief message for her son ; took her seat on the scaffold, listened with an air of even cheerful unconcern to the reading of her sentence, solemnly declared her innocence of the charge conveyed in it and her consolation in the prospect of ultimate justice, rejected the professional services of Richard Fletcher, dean of Peterborough, lifted up her voice in Latin against his in English prayer, and when he and his fellow-worshippers had fallen duly silent prayed aloud for the prosperity of her own Church, for Elizabeth, for her son, and for all the enemies whom she had commended overnight to the notice of the Spanish invader ; then, with

no less courage than had marked every hour and every action of her life, received the stroke of death from the wavering hand of the headsman.

Mary Stuart was in many respects the creature of her age, of her creed, and of her station ; but the noblest and most noteworthy qualities of her nature were independent of rank, opinion, or time. Even the detractors who defend her conduct on the plea that she was a dastard and a dupe are compelled in the same breath to retract this implied reproach, and to admit, with illogical acclamation and incongruous applause, that the world never saw more splendid courage at the service of more brilliant intelligence ; that a braver if not 'a rarer spirit never did steer humanity.' A kinder or more faithful friend, a deadlier or more dangerous enemy, it would be impossible to dread or to desire. Passion alone could shake the double fortress of her impregnable heart and ever active brain. The passion of love, after very sufficient experience, she apparently and naturally outlived ; the passion of hatred and revenge was as inextinguishable in her inmost nature as the emotion of loyalty and gratitude. Of repentance it would seem that she knew as little as of fear ; having been trained from her infancy in a religion where the Decalogue was supplanted by the Creed. Adept as she was in the most exquisite delicacy of dissimulation, the most salient note of her original disposition was daring rather than subtlety. Beside or behind the voluptuous or intellectual attractions of beauty and culture, she had about her the fresher charm of a fearless and frank simplicity, a genuine and enduring pleasure in small and harmless things no less than in such as were neither.

In 1562 she amused herself for some days by living 'with her little troop' in the house of a burgess of St. Andrews 'like a burgess's wife,' assuring the English ambassador that he should not find the queen there,—'nor I know not myself where she is become.' From Sheffield Lodge, twelve years later, she applied to the archbishop of Glasgow and the cardinal of Guise for some pretty little dogs, to be sent her in baskets very warmly packed—'for besides reading and working, I take pleasure only in all the little animals that I can get.' No lapse of reconciling time, no extent of comparative indulgence, could break her into resignation, submission, or toleration of even partial restraint. Three months after the massacre of St. Bartholomew had caused some additional restrictions to be placed upon her freedom of action, Shrewsbury writes to Burghley that 'rather than continue this imprisonment she sticks not to say she will give her body, her son, and country for liberty'; nor did she ever show any excess of regard for any of the three. For her own freedom of will and of way, of passion and of action, she cared much; for her creed she cared something; for her country she cared less than nothing. She would have flung Scotland with England into the hellfire of Spanish Catholicism rather than forego the faintest chance of personal revenge. Her profession of a desire to be instructed in the doctrines of Anglican Protestantism was so transparently a pious fraud as rather to afford confirmation than to arouse suspicion of her fidelity to the teaching of her Church. Elizabeth, so shamefully her inferior in personal loyalty, fidelity, and gratitude, was as clearly her superior on the one all-important point of patriotism.

The saving salt of Elizabeth's character, with all its wellnigh incredible mixture of heroism and egotism, meanness and magnificence, was simply this; that, overmuch as she loved herself, she did yet love England better. Her best though not her only fine qualities were national and political, the high public virtues of a good public servant: in the private and personal qualities which attract and attach a friend to his friend and a follower to his leader, no man or woman was ever more constant and more eminent than Mary Queen of Scots.

APPENDIX.

I.

A RELIC OF DRYDEN.

Two of the most illustrious names in the whole history of letters stand inscribed among theirs who have recorded their protest against the curious impertinence of research which insists on tracking, recovering, and preserving the slightest and least worthy fragments or remnants of a great man's work. It would be difficult to strike the balance of acrimony between the several rebukes administered to this surely not unnatural even if not wholly reasonable appetite of the mind, as habitual probably among grateful students as among 'curious impertinents,' by Voltaire on the one hand and by Landor on the other. And it was on the reissue in Scott's edition of all the miscellaneous work which did least honour to the hand and does least credit to the memory of Dryden that the great English critic and poet expended the sharpest expression of his fiery contempt. Yet something, I venture to think, may be pleaded on behalf of the curious in almost all cases of the kind. They are at least not parallel or comparable with such atrocious profanation of the inmost privacies and most secret sanctities of life and death as many years since was so grandly stigmatized by Lord Tennyson 'after reading a Life and Letters.' What a man has once given to the public eye is his no longer, to be taken back at pleasure or cancelled on change of mind. And whatever concerning in any way so great a name as Dryden's may be discovered and recorded at this distance

of time cannot but be of some small interest at least to all students of English literature.

It is but too certain, on the other hand,—and I should be the last to question or dispute the certainty,—that no lover of Dryden's fame could wish to see any addition made to the already too long list of his comedies. Rather might we reasonably desire, were it possible, to strike off several of these from the roll and erase the record of their perpetration for ever. Why then, it will most properly and inevitably be asked, —why then be at pains to unearth an ugly and unsavoury relic of the Restoration—a word for which history, whether French or English, reads Degradation—on the chance that we may discover in such miry clay the impression of Dryden's great dishonoured hand? there were surely stains enough already on the broad hard outlines of its giant strength. And certainly, if I had but stumbled across a new sample of his indecent impotence and laborious incapacity in the heavy ploughed field of low comedy or farce, I should have had no thought but to let it lie. But if indeed there be anything of Dryden's in a long-forgotten play which was issued in his lifetime under cover of his approbation as containing a scene supplied by his own hand, it must be sought in one of two passages where the style suddenly changes from the roughest farce to the gravest and most high-toned rhetoric of which comedy can properly be capable.

In the year 1675 the too copious comic literature of the period was enlarged by the publication of 'The Mistaken Husband. A Comedie, as it is Acted by His Majesties servants At the Theatre-Royall. By a Person of Quality.—Hæc placuit semel.—[*Hor.*]' I should hardly have thought so, even then: at all events, we have no reason to suppose that on a tenth repetition it was found equally pleasing. Between title-page and prologue we find our only reason for taking notice of it, in the following address of 'the Bookseller to the Reader.'

'This Play was left in Mr. *Dryden's* hands many years since: The Author of it was unknown to him, and return'd not to claim

it; 'Tis therefore to be presum'd that he is dead. After Twelve years expectation, Mr. *Dryden* gave it to the Players, having upon perusal of it, found that it deserv'd a better Fate than to be buried in obscurity: I have heard him say, that finding a Scene wanting, he supply'd it; and many have affirm'd, that the stile of it' (of the play, that is, in general; not by any means of the additional scene) 'is proper to the Subject, which is that the French call *Basse Comedy* (*sic*). The turns of it are natural,' (I should be loth to bet on the chance of any reader's agreement with the bookseller on this point) 'and the resemblance of one man to another, has not only been the foundation of this, but of many other Plays. *Plautus* his *Amphitrion*, was the Original of all, and *Shakespear* and *Moliere* have copied him with success. Nevertheless, if this Play in it self should be a trifle, which you have no reason to suspect, because that incomparable Person would not from his Ingenious labours lose so much time as to write a whole Scene in it, which in it self sufficiently makes you amends, for Poetry being like Painting, where, if a great Master have but touch'd upon an ordinary Piece, he makes it of Value to all understanding Men; as I doubt not but this will be by his Additions: As it is, I am resolv'd to detain you no longer from it, but subscribe myself,

'Your very Humble Servant,

'R. BENTLEY.'

After this somewhat Gampian example of publisher's English, the prologue naturally follows: and no reader who considers the date will be surprised to learn that neither prologue nor epilogue is presentable to eyes polite. Nor does either of these effusions—though certainly this is not an inevitable corollary to be inferred from the preceding proposition—show any trace whatever of the laureate's master-hand. Nor, again, will any reader who takes account of the subject and the model indicated by the admiring publisher be much amazed at the information that even under the regency of Nell Gwyn and Barbara Palmer some passages of this 'Orphan Play'—as the pathetic prologue defines it—may have seemed almost exceptionally outrageous even to an audience not yet chaste enough—as in our own pure and happy period—to applaud the rankest ribaldry of foreign farces, while proscribing for

moral and decorous reasons the purest masterpieces of foreign tragedy. Not that there is any great harm in this homebred farce, though it is extravagant in every sense at all points; rough and ready, coarse and boisterous, nautically jocose and erotic—rather flagrant of Wapping than fragrant of Whitehall. But it is as far from the deliberate and elaborate brutality of Wycherley, Shadwell, and Dryden himself, in their best and worst comedies, as from the daintier naughtiness and graceless grace of Etherege. Nor has it anything—in speaking of an English work produced in any but the age of Rochester it would be happily superfluous to certify that it had nothing—of the 'unspeakable' and ultra-Turkish taint which in that noble poet's contemporary alteration of Fletcher's *Valentinian* is rank enough to commend it even to the abnormal appetite of a moralist after the order of Petronius. But 'in an honest way' (as Prior has it) there is here undoubtedly no stint of 'that same'—in other words, of broad rampant full-blown merriment, playing noisily about the nuptial couch of a plebeian Alcmena. 'A younger brother,' as he describes himself, 'of the house of Mercury,' being in love with an usurer's daughter, whose 'father sent her husband of an errand, no man knows whither,' nine years before the action of the comedy begins, takes advantage of such a personal resemblance to the bridegroom as precludes the necessity of supernatural juggling or miraculous disguise to impose upon father and daughter alike the belief that the wanderer has returned in his person, rich enough to 'get children in embroidered coats.' As no deity could here be called in to loose the knot, 'to gild the pill,' and to announce the nativity of a Hercules, the playwright has hit on a happily ingenious device wherewith to reconcile controversy and to conciliate morality: for this, unlike his politer fellows of the more courtly stage, the honest unknown has actually been at pains to accomplish by the expedient of assimilating the household arrangements of his Amphitryon and Alcmena to those of the couple corresponding to that Grecian pair in the scriptural record of Christian mythology. The

Amphitryon or rather the Joseph of this new version of an old tale was 'surpriz'd upon his Wedding-day, and separated from her'—his virgin bride—'by her Father': so that when on his return he finds himself supplanted or anticipated by the intervention of a 'Jupiter-Scapin,' who has won his way to the heart of his Alcmena by means no less energetic than ingenious, he is able as well as ready to resign her to a rival so deserving, on the ground that 'he has been above seven years away beyond Sea, and has never Writ her word he was alive; so that in Law the Marriage is void.' And thus is Morality reconciled with the Comic Muse; surely to the no small comfort of the moral reader, who on his way towards this desirable consummation will have come across too many 'a little piece of sculduddery, which after all' (as Nanty Ewart well puts it) 'does nobody any harm,' and means none; which unhappily is more than can be said for all Dryden's own writings. The rude honest humour of the main action is quite unlike the heavy weary movement of his joyless and shameless, witless and thankless labours in the comic line. But here if anywhere is surely something of the noble grace and simple strength of his more firm and serious manner, effective and serviceable always, even when most hasty, crude, and conventional in details of expression.

Alcmena, be it understood, has just detected the false Amphitryon by the difference of his voice from that of her long since vagabond bridegroom.

> So willingly I pray to be deceived,
> That I could wish one Sense a Traytor to me,
> For all things else conspire in your reception;
> But this old trusty servant, the Sense of Hearing
> Evinces plainly you are not the man.
> *Haz.* That Servant you call Trusty, is a Traytor,
> Or an o're-diligent officious Servant,
> Whose care creates imaginary difficulties
> And dangers, where the path is safe, and easie.
> Please to consult the Steward of your Soul,
> And Ruler of your Senses, Your wise *Reason.*

Ask if nine Winters Cold, nine Summers Heats,
And almost a continual emptiness
Can chuse but alter th' Organs of the Voice?
Oh! Madam, Madam, did you know my Story,
You'd rather wonder I can speak at all,
Then [Than] that my Tone is chang'd: if that be all
The scruple, from this hour I will be dumb;
And give no food to your distrust.
Mrs. Man. It must be he.
Sir, you may spare that Pennance; I'le delight
To hear you tell with this Voice, how your old one
Departed from you, and by frequent hearing
Forget the difference of their sounds. Believe me!
My heart shall ever be so full of joyes
For your deliverance; I will not weep
When you relate your Sorrows.

If this pretty passage be thought too gentle in its tone for the generally untender Muse of Dryden, I would refer the objector to an equally simple and graceful dialogue in verse between Leonidas and Palmyra in the chaotic tragicomedy of *Marriage à la Mode*.

Haz. Love, I am now thy Sacrifice, on this
Thy living Alter I lay down my life.
Mrs. Man. May the same fire that burns the Victim, seize
The Altar too, since I am it.
Haz. How charming she looks now?
When she was conceiv'd, her Mother look't on Lillies.
O! I could stare for ever here! Wild Poetry!
Creatrix of Impossibilities,
Shew me but such another 'mong thy Quire
Of Goddesses, and I'le forgo my Conquest.

Act II., Scene I.

A fellow-student whose verdict on such a question carries no light weight with it would assign to Dryden rather this than the scene which I proceed to transcribe at full length, *literatè* as before and *punctatim*, having been inclined for my own part to exclaim on a first reading of it, 'either John Dryden or the Devil.'

Mrs. Manley alone.

To what a Precipice do you hurry me,
My wicked thoughts! O whether am I reeling!
Why did I not acknowledge my delusion?
Then I had yet been white in my own innocence:
Whereas this rash black act of my denying him,
Stains me all over with incontinence.
Now I perceive sins do not walk alone;
But have long trains, endless concomitants,
Who acts but one will soon commit a Million.

(*Enter Hazard.*)

He comes again, this ravisher of my honour,
And yet, I know not why, I cannot hate him!
Would he could put on some less pleasing form;
I am not safe in this—But I must Muster
All I have left of vertue to resist him.

Haz. Peace to your fair thoughts, sweet Lady.

Mrs. Man. It must come then, by some other Messenger.
Thou art the Screech-owl to [me], the bird of night
That bod'st nought but ill: Why do'st thou follow me!

Haz. Why do you fly me!

Mrs. Man. Because thou Breath'st infection on me: thou art
A Pestilence (or should'st be!) to my nature.

Haz. If I'm infectious, 'tis alone with Love;
And then no wonder, if like those who bear
Contagion about 'em, I desire
To infect you with the same Disease!

Mrs. Man. I bear thy spots already in my Fame:
And they are Mortal to it.

Dryden, surely, at once in cast of thought, in turn of phrase, in ring and swing of metre.

Haz. They are not visible:
And so long, all conclude you may be cur'd.
I can bring Cordials to restore your honour,
But you shun your Physitian.

Mrs. Man. No, my Condition's desperate; 'tis past help.
I am undone for ever.

Haz. How many Women whose names stand white in the Records of Fame, have acted willingly what you were wrought by

fraud to suffer; only they keep it from the publique knowledge, and therefore they are innocent. How many Fair ones, were this your story acted in a Play, would come to see it sitting by their Husbands, and secretly accuse themselves of more. So full of spots and brakes is humane life, but only we see all things by false lights, which hide defects, and gloss o're what's amiss.—Grant me your Love once more, and I will yet restore your Honour: You shall appear as vertuous and innocent, as you are fair and charming.

Mrs. Man. How dar'st thou move so impudent a Suit,
Or hope the least success in't! Can I think
Of all Mankind thou canst restore my Honour;
Thou Thief, thou Murtherer, thou destroyer of it.

Haz. I grant I am a Thief, and who so proper
To give [? back] Wealth, as he who robb'd you of it?
But I have not destroy'd it: 'tis it[1] safe (*sic*),
And does not that deserve some recompence.
Love me, and let me get a new possession
From knowledge of that good your Error gave me,
And you shall see what——

Mrs. Man. Never, name it no more; no prayers shall ever win me.
No Sophistry seduce, or Tortures force me
To one dishonest act, now known dishonest!

Haz. What contrary effects enjoyment causes!
In you a loathing, and in me a love!
The sence of such a blessing once possest,
Makes me long after what before I priz'd not!
And sure that needs must be the truest passion,
Which from possession grows; for then we know
Why 'tis, and what we love: all love before,
Is but a guess of an uncertain good,
Which often, when enjoy'd we find not so.

Mrs. Man. Why am I forc'd to tell you that I love you!
I do, and blush to say it; but my guilt
Shall reach no farther than my self; expect
No fruit from my Confession, no new yielding.
Yet love me still—for that I may permit you;

[1] *Qu.* for *it* read *yet*?

Think of no other woman for my sake,
And I'le forgive you what is past: and sometimes
More then I should remember you!
Haz. And is this all that I must ever hope?
Mrs. Man. This is too much!
Have pitty on me, and demand no more:
Leave me some Love for him who should have all:
And, if you have so much of honour in you,
Invent some means to piece my shatter'd Fame.
Haz. Madam, I will not shame your Charity:
You have forgiven me, and I'le deserve it:
I'le give you from my self; though I can ne're
Forget you have been mine: You have left in me
An hatred to all woman kind besides,
And more undone me in this short visionary joy
Of once possessing, then I e're could you.
Mrs. Man. Then Farewel!
Farewel the mutual ruine of each other:
Farewel a dream of Heaven; how am I tost
Betwixt my duty and my strong desires!
Dash't like a ship, upon an unseen Rock;
And when my care can hardly get me off:
Yet I am ready to repeat my crime;
And scarce forbear to strike a second time.

(*Exeunt severally.*)
Act IV., Scene V.

Here assuredly, as a critic of the period could hardly have let pass the occasion to remark with a dignified complacency, 'vocem comœdia tollit.' The compound of coarseness with sincerity, the default of depth, intensity, or pathos in the passion of this scene, the strenuous simplicity of style, its downright straightforwardness and sturdy fervour of plain speech and frank feeling, mark it in my mind as neither unlikely nor unworthy to be the work of its possible author. Almost I am persuaded to say—

> Mine eye hath well examined its parts,
> And finds them perfect Dryden.

A reader must be very imperfectly imbued with the spirit

or skilled in the manner of his work, who imagines that the sole representative and distinctive qualities of his tragic or serious dramatic verse are to be sought or found in the resonant reverberations of amœbæan rant which roll and peal in prolonged and portentous echoes of fulminant epigram through the still dilating dialogue of his yet not undelightful heroic plays.

It was not till sixteen years after its publication that Dryden found it necessary, not to disown his partnership in this comedy, but to disclaim the imputation of its single authorship, by the issue of 'the following Advertisement,' (according to Malone, *Life of Dryden*, 1800, p. 56) prefixed to *King Arthur*, 4to, 1691 :

'Finding that several of my friends in buying my plays, &c. bound together, have been imposed on by the booksellers foisting in a play which is not mine, [THE MISTAKEN HUSBAND,] I have here, to prevent this for the future, set down a catalogue of my plays and poems in quarto, putting the plays in the order I wrote them. 'JOHN DRYDEN.'

The absence from this advertisement of any contradiction to the statement put forward by the original publisher seems to afford some additional grain of evidence that (in the famous phrase of Heywood) he had, if not a hand, at least a finger in the play.

I do not flatter myself that the little windfall I have here picked up will be taken as an especially thankworthy godsend by any student of our incomparable and inexhaustible dramatic literature. What I have done has been done simply out of that respect for a great man's memory which informs almost anything that relates to him with more or less interest for us all: Ad Majorem D[ryd]e[n]i Gloriam: to the glory of Glorious John.

II.

SIR HENRY TAYLOR ON SHELLEY.

(See page 120.)

TEN days after the appearance of this essay I received from the illustrious and venerable author of *Philip van Artevelde* a letter containing a word of protest—no one ever honoured by his correspondence will need to be told that it was a most courteous and friendly word of protest—against the expression of my reference to his depreciatory remarks on the merit or the tendency of Shelley's writings. My meaning, of course, was that it was a habit of Wordsworthians in general, not of Sir Henry Taylor in particular, to decry the imaginative power and to deny the ethical value of those writings; but it was impossible to regret a misapprehension—so readily removed—which procured me the pleasure of an assurance that the passage reflecting on Shelley in the preface to the greatest historic drama which the countrymen of Shakespeare had seen for two centuries did not express the full or the maturer opinion of the writer. It must be needless, I should hope, to say that I should not have thought of making public, without leave asked and given, any passage from a private letter: but the answer which I received to the question whether I might hold myself authorized to make public an assurance so gratifying to the common admirers of both poets was a full permission to make any use of his letter that I thought fit. I have therefore no reason to deny myself the pleasure of transcribing this passage from it:—'It is true that I designate

him' (Shelley—in the preface to *Philip van Artevelde*) 'as "purely and pre-eminently a visionary"; and I dwell too much, I am afraid, and in too depreciating a spirit, upon what I conceived to be a want of relevancy in his poetry to the truths of life and nature. I am sorry for this, which, on your authority, I will readily assume to be an undue depreciation; but I should have been far—far more sorry if I had ever spoken of Shelley in a gibing and girding spirit, or in any spirit but one of great admiration for the gifts he possessed, whatever I may have considered, erroneously or not, to be those in which he was wanting.' From a poet aged eighty-four, to the memory of a poet who never saw his thirtieth birthday, it seems to me that this may be accepted as a sufficient reparation, and indeed as a sufficient tribute; for anything further in the way of palinode or recantation no rational student of Shelley will feel that there was any need, or wish for any fuller avowal of atoning and reconciling admiration.

III.

NOTE ON THE CHARACTER OF MARY QUEEN OF SCOTS.

Among the various points of view taken in time past and present by students of a subject which must surely have lost its interest long since if that interest were less than inexhaustible, I have always missed, and wondered at the general oversight which appears to ignore it, one which would most naturally seem to present itself for candid and rational consideration by either party to the argument. Every shade of possible opinion on the matter has found in its various champions every possible gradation of ability in debate. And the universal result, as it appears to an outsider,—to a student of history unconscious alike of prejudice and of prepossession,—is that they who came to curse the memory of Mary Stuart have blessed it as with the blessing of a Balaam, and they who came to bless it, with tribute of panegyric or with testimony in defence, have inevitably and invariably cursed it altogether. To vindicate her from the imputations of her vindicators would be the truest service that could now be done by the most loyal devotion to her name and fame.

A more thorough, more earnest, and on the whole a more able apology for any disputed or debatable character in all the range of history it would indeed be hard to find than that which has been attempted by Mr. Hosack in his two copious and laborious volumes on *Mary Queen of Scots and her Accusers*. Every point of vantage throughout the intricacies of irreconcilable evidence is clearly seen, is swiftly seized, is manfully

defended. And the ultimate outcome of all is the presentation of a figure beside which, I do not say the Mary Stuart of Mr. Froude, but the Mary Stuart of George Buchanan, is an acceptable and respectable type of royal womanhood—a pardonable if not admirable example of human character. Many bitter and terrible things were said of that woman in her lifetime by many fierce and unscrupulous enemies of her person or her creed: many grave and crushing charges were alleged against her on plausible or improbable grounds of impeachment or suspicion. But two things were never imputed to her by the most reckless ferocity of malice or of fear. No one ever dreamed of saying that Mary Queen of Scots was a fool. And no one ever dared to suggest that Mary Queen of Scots was a coward.

That there are fewer moral impossibilities than would readily be granted by the professional moralist, those students of human character who are not professional moralists may very readily admit. A very short and a very narrow experience will suffice to preserve a man—or for that matter a boy—of average intelligence from any sense of shocked astonishment when his expectation is confronted by 'fears of the brave and follies of the wise,' instances of mercy in the unmerciful or cruelty in the humane. But there is a limit to the uttermost range of such paradoxical possibilities. And that limit is reached and crossed, cleared at a leap and left far out of sight, by the theorist who demands our assent to such a theorem as this: That a woman whose intelligence was below the average level of imbecility, and whose courage was below the average level of a coward's, should have succeeded throughout the whole course of a singularly restless and adventurous career in imposing herself upon the judgment of every man and every woman with whom she ever came into any sort or kind of contact, as a person of the most brilliant abilities and the most dauntless daring. Credat Catholicus; for such faith must surely exceed the most credulous capacity of ancient Jew or modern Gentile.

But this is not all, or nearly all. Let us admit, though it be no small admission, that Mary Stuart, who certainly managed to pass herself off upon every one who came near her under any circumstances as the brightest and the bravest creature of her kind in any rank or any country of the world, was dastard enough to be cowed into a marriage which she was idiot enough to imagine could be less than irretrievable ruin to her last chance of honour or prosperity. The violence of Bothwell and the perfidy of her council imposed forsooth this miserable necessity on the credulous though reluctant victim of brute force on the one hand and treasonable fraud on the other. Persuaded by the request and convinced by the reasoning of those about her, Lucretia felt it nothing less than a duty to accept the hand of Tarquin yet reeking from the blood of Collatinus. The situation is worthy of one of Mr. Gilbert's incomparable ballads or burlesques; and her contemporaries, Catholic or Protestant, friend or foe, rival or ally, may be forgiven if they failed at once to grasp and realize it as a sufficiently plausible solution of all doubts and difficulties not otherwise as rationally explicable. Yet possibly it may not be impossible that an exceptionally stupid girl, reared from her babyhood in an atmosphere of artificially exceptional innocence, might play at once the active and the passive part assigned to Mary, before and after the execution of the plot against her husband's life, by the traducers who have undertaken her defence. But for this improbability to be possible it is obviously necessary to assume in this pitiable puppet an extent of ignorance to be equalled only, and scarcely, by the depth and the density of her dullness. A woman utterly wanting in tact, intuition, perception of character or grasp of circumstance—a woman abnormally devoid of such native instinct and such acquired insight as would suffice to preserve all but the dullest of natures from ludicrous indiscretion and perilous indelicacy—might perhaps for lack of experience be betrayed into such a succession of mishaps as the training of an ideally rigid convent might have left it difficult or impossible for her fatuous innocence to fore-

see. But of the convent in which Mary Stuart had passed her novitiate the Lady Superior was Queen Catherine de' Medici. The virgins who shared the vigils of her maidenhood or brightened the celebration of her nuptials were such as composed the Queen-Mother's famous 'flying squadron' of high-born harlots, professionally employed in the task of making the worship of Venus Pandemos subserve the purposes of Catholic faith or polity, and occasionally, as on the Feast of St. Bartholomew, exhilarated by such diversions as the jocose examination of naked and newly-murdered corpses with an eye to the satisfaction of a curiosity which the secular pen of a modern historian must decline to explain with the frankness of a clerical contemporary. The cloistral precinct which sheltered her girlhood from such knowledge of evil as might in after days have been of some protection to her guileless levity was the circuit of a court whose pursuits and recreations were divided between the alcoves of Sodom and the playground of Aceldama. What were the vices of the society described by Brantôme it is impossible, or at least it would be repulsive, to suggest by so much as a hint: but its virtues were homicide and adultery. Knox or Ascham would have given plainer and juster expression, in shorter terms of speech more purely English, to the fact that no man was honoured who could not show blood on his hands, no woman admired who would not boast as loudly of the favours she had granted as her gallants of the favours they had received. It is but a slight matter to add that the girl who was reared from her very infancy in this atmosphere—in the atmosphere of a palace which it would be flattery to call a brothel or a slaughter-house—had for her mother a woman of the blood-stained house of Guise, and for her father the gaberlunzie-man or jolly beggar of numberless and nameless traditional adventures in promiscuous erotic intrigue. The question of family is of course very far from conclusive, though certainly it may help 'to thicken other proofs that do demonstrate thinly.' The calendar of saints includes a Borgia; or, to put it perhaps more forcibly, the

house of Borgia contains a saint. And some writers—Landor among them, who had little love for the brood—have averred that the Bonaparte family did once produce an honest man and equitable ruler—Louis king of Holland, whose only son gave his life in vain for Italy. It would certainly have been no greater miracle than these, no more startling exception to the general rule, that the daughter of James V. and Mary of Guise should have been a blameless though imbe ile creature, an innocent in the least flattering sense of the word, whose blood was very snow-broth and whose brain a very feather. But mere innocence, as distinguished from the absolute idiocy which even her warmest admirers would hesitate to ascribe to her, will hardly suffice to explain her course of conduct in the most critical period of her life. A woman who could play the part assigned to Mary by the Whitakers, Stricklands, Aytouns and Hosacks whose laudations have so cruelly libelled her, must have been either the veriest imbecile whose craven folly ever betrayed in every action an innate and irresponsible impotence of mind, or at least and at best a good girl of timid temper and weak intellect, who had been tenderly sheltered all her life from any possible knowledge or understanding of evil, from all apprehension as from all experience of wickedness and wrong. Now it is of course just barely possible that a girl might come innocent as Shakespeare's Marina even out of such a house of entertainment as that kept by the last princes of the race of Valois : but it is absolutely and glaringly impossible that she should come forth from it ignorant of evil. And it is not a jot less impossible that an innocent woman who was not animally idiotic or angelically ignorant, a drivelling craven or a thing enskied and sainted, the pitifullest or the purest, the most thick-witted or the most unspotted of her kind, could have borne herself as did Mary after the murder of her caitiff husband. Let us assume, though it is no small assumption, that all her enemies were liars and forgers. Let us imagine that except among her adherents there was not a man of any note in all Scotland who was not capable of treason

as infamous as that of the English conspirators on her behalf against the life of Elizabeth and the commonwealth of their country. Let us suppose that a Buchanan, for example, was what Mr. Ho ack has called him, 'the prince of literary prostitutes': a rascal cowardly enough to put forth in print a foul and formless mass of undigested fals hood and rancorous ribaldry, and venal enough to traffic in the disgrace of his dishonourable name for a purpose as infamous as his act. Let us concede that a Maitland was cur enough to steal that name as a mask for the impudent malice of ingratitude. Let us allow that Murray may have been the unscrupulous traitor and Elizabeth the malignant rival of Marian tradition. Let us admit that the truest solution of a complicated riddle may be that most ingenious theory advocated by Mr. Hosack, which addresses to Darnley instead of Bothwell the most passionate and pathetic of the Casket Letters, and cancels as incongruous forgeries all those which refuse to fit into this scheme of explanation. Let us grant that the forgers were at once as clumsy as Cloten and as ingenious as Iago. The fact remains no less obvious and obtrusive than before, that it is very much easier to blacken the fame of Mary's confederate enemies than to whitewash the reputation of Bothwell's royal wife. And what manner of whitewash is that which substitutes for the features of an erring but heroic woman those of a creature not above but beneath the human possibility of error or of sin?

But if we reject as incredible the ideal of Prince Labanoff's loyal and single-hearted credulity, does it follow that we must accept the ideal of Mr Froude's implacable and single-eyed animosity? Was the mistress of Bothwell, the murderess of Darnley, the conspiratress against the throne and life of her kinswoman and hostess, by any necessary consequence the mere panther and serpent of his fascinating and magnificent study? This seems to me no more certain a corollary than that because she went to the scaffold with a false front her severed head, at the age of forty-five, must have been that 'of a grizzled, wrinkled old woman.' By such flashes of fiery and

ostentatious partisanship the brilliant and fervent advocate of the Tudors shows his hand, if I may say so without offence, a little too unconsciously and plainly. And his ultimate conclusion that 'she was a bad woman, disguised in the livery of a martyr,' (vol. xii., ch. 34) seems to me not much better supported by the sum of evidence producible on either side than the counter inference of his most pertinacious antagonist that 'this illustrious victim of sectarian violence and barbarous statecraft will ever occupy the most prominent place in the annals of her sex' (Hosack, vol. ii., ch. 27). There are annals and annals, from the Acta Sanctorum to the Newgate Calendar. In the former of these records Mr. Hosack, in the latter Mr. Froude, would inscribe—as I cannot but think, with equal unreason—the name of Mary Stuart.

'She was a bad woman,' says the ardent and energetic advocate on the devil's side in this matter, because 'she was leaving the world with a lie on her lips,' when with her last breath she protested her innocence of the charge on which she was condemned to death. But the God of her worship, the God in whom she trusted, the God on whom she had been taught to lean for support of her conscience, would no more have been offended at this than the God of Dahomey is offended by human sacrifice. Witness all the leading spirits among his servants, in that age if in no other, from pope to king and from king to cutthroat—from Gregory XIII. and Sextus V. to Philip II. and Charles IX., and from Philip II. and Charles IX. to Saulx-Tavannes and Maurevel. To their God and hers a lie was hardly less acceptable service than a murder; Blessed Judas was a servant only less commendable than Saint Cain. Nor, on the whole, would it appear that the lapse of time has brought any perceptible improvement to the moral character of this deity. The *coup d'état* of August 24, 1572, was not an offering of sweeter savour in his expansive and insatiable nostrils than was the St. Bartholomew of December 2, 1851. From the same chair the vicar of the same God bestowed the same approving benediction on Florentine and on Corsican

perjurer and murderer. And in a worshipper of this divine devil, in the ward of a Medici or a Bonaparte, it would be an inhuman absurdity to expect the presence or condemn the absence of what nothing far short of a miracle could have implanted—the sense of right and wrong, the distinction of good from evil, the preference of truth to falsehood. The heroine of Fotheringay was by no means a bad woman: she was a creature of the sixteenth century, a Catholic and a queen. What is really remarkable is what is really admirable in her nature, and was ineradicable as surely as it was unteachable by royal training or by religious creed. I desire no better evidence in her favour than may be gathered from the admissions of her sternest judge and bitterest enemy. 'Throughout her life,' Mr. Froude allows, 'she never lacked gratitude to those who had been true to her.—Never did any human creature meet death more bravely.' Except in the dialect of the pulpit, she is not a bad woman of whom so much at least must be said and cannot be denied. Had she been born the man that she fain would have been born, no historian surely would have refused her a right to a high place among other heroes and above other kings. All Mr. Froude's vituperative terms cannot impair the nobility of the figure he presents to our unapproving admiration: all Mr. Hosack's sympathetic phrases cannot exalt the poverty of the spirit he exposes for our unadmiring compassion. For however much we may admire the courage he ascribes to her at the last, we cannot remember with less than contemptuous pity the pusillanimous imbecility which on his showing had been the distinctive quality of her miserable life. According to her champion, a witness against her more pitiless than John Knox or Edmund Spenser, she had done nothing in her time of trial that an innocent woman would have done, and left nothing undone that an innocent woman would have studiously abstained from doing, if she had not been in the idiotic sense an innocent indeed. But it is in their respective presentations of the closing scene at Fotheringay that the incurable prepossession of view which is common

to both advocates alike springs suddenly into sharpest illustration and relief. Mr. Froude cannot refrain from assuming, on grounds too slight for Macaulay to have accepted as sufficient for the damnation of a Jacobite, that on receipt of her death-warrant the queen of Scots 'was dreadfully agitated,' and 'at last broke down altogether,' before the bearers of the sudden intelligence had left her. Now every line of the narrative preceding this imputation makes it more and more insuperably difficult to believe that in all her dauntless life Queen Mary can ever have been 'dreadfully agitated,' except by anger and another passion at least as different from fear. But this exhibition of prepense partisanship is nothing to the grotesque nakedness of Mr. Hosack's. At a first reading it is difficult for a reader to believe the evidence of his eyesight when he finds a historian who writes himself 'barrister-at-law,' and should surely have some inkling of the moral weight or worth of evidence as to character, deliberately asserting that in her dying appeal for revenge to the deadliest enemy of England and its queen, Mary, after studious enumeration of every man's name against whom she bore such resentment as she desired might survive her death, and strike them down with her dead hand by way of retributive sacrifice, 'exhibited an unparalleled instance of feminine forbearance and generosity' (the sarcasm implied on womanhood is too savage for the most sweeping satire of a Thackeray or a Pope) 'in omitting the name of Elizabeth.' *O sancta simplicitas!* Who shall say after this that the practice of the legal profession is liable to poison the gushing springs of youth's ingenuous trustfulness and single-minded optimism?

An advocate naturally or professionally incapable of such guileless confidence and ingenuous self-betrayal is Father John Morris, 'Priest of the Society of Jesus,' and editor of 'The Letter-books of Sir Amias Poulet, Keeper of Mary Queen of Scots': a volume nothing less than invaluable as well as indispensable to all serious students of the subject in hand. Writers of genius and impetuosity such as Mr. Froude's and the late

Canon Kingsley's lay themselves open at many points of minor importance to the decisive charge or the wary fence of an antagonist expert in the fine art of controversy: but their main or ultimate positions may prove none the less difficult to carry by the process of countermine or other sacerdotal tactics. Father Morris is not quite so hard on his client as Mr. Hosack: for by admitting something of what is undeniable in the charges of history against her he attenuates the effect and diminishes the prominence of his inevitable and obvious prepossessions: and though he suggests (p. 275) that 'perhaps Mary was not quite "the fiery woman" Mr. Froude imagines her to have been,' he does not pretend to exhibit her as the watery thing of tears and terrors held up to our compassion by the relentless if unconscious animosity of the implacable counsel for her defence.

On one point (p. 143) the pleading of Father Morris must in no inconsiderable measure command the sympathy of all Englishmen who honestly love fair play, and that not only when it plays into their own hands. It is surely much more than high time, after the lapse of three centuries, that honest and generous men of different creeds and parties should be equally ready to do justice, if not to each other's God,—since Gods are by necessity of nature irreconcilable and internecine,—at least to the memories of their common countrymen, who played their part manfully in their day on either side with fair and loyal weapons of attack and defence. We regard with disgust and the horror of revolted conscience that vile and execrable doctrine which assures us in childhood that the glory of martyrdom depends on the martyr's orthodoxy of opinion, on the accuracy of his reckoning or the justice of his conjecture as to spiritual matters of duty or of faith, on the happiness of a guess or the soundness of an argument; but surely it profits us little to have cleared our conscience of such a creed if we remain incapable of doing justice to Jesuit and Calvinist, creedsman and atheist, alike. It profits us little if we are to involve in one ignominy with the unscrupulous and treasonous

intrigues of Parsons and Garnet the blameless labours and the patient heroism of Edmund Campion. So far, then, Father Morris has a good card in hand, and plays it well and fairly, when he pleads, for example, against Mr. Froude's charges, and on behalf of his own famous Society, that 'Gilbert Gifford had no "Jesuit training," and "the Order" never had anything to do with him;—but it is necessary to note that all through Mr. Froude's *History* he habitually styles "Jesuits" those who never had anything in the world to do with the Society of which St. Ignatius Loyola was the founder.' Gilbert Gifford was a traitor, and any man must be eager to avoid the disgrace of any connection, though never so remote or oblique, with a traitor's infamy. But I hope it may not be held incompatible with all respect for the conscientious labours of Father Morris, and with all gratitude for help and obligation conferred by them, to remark with due deference that a champion of Jesuits against the malignant errors of calumnious misrepresentation would be wise to avoid all occasion given to heretical pravity for a scoff on the old scores of pious fraud or suggestion of falsehood. Exactly two hundred and five pages after this pathetic protest of conscious virtue and candid indignation against the inexcusable injustice of an anti-Catholic historian, this denouncer of Mr. Froude's unfair dealing and unfounded statements, 'the parallel of which it would be difficult to find in any one claiming to occupy the judicial position of a historian,' affords the following example of his own practical respect for historical justice and accuracy of statement.

'Not only,' he says, with righteous disgust at such brutality, 'not only would Poulet deprive Mary of Melville and du Préau, but, writing too from his own sick bed, he betrays his wish to remove the medical attendants also, though his prisoner was in chronic ill health.'

The whole and sole ground for such an imputation is given, with inconsistent if not unwary frankness, on the very next page but one in the text of Paulet's letter to Davison.

'The physician, apothecary, and the surgeon have been so

often allowed to this lady by her Majesty's order, that I may not take upon me to displace them without special warrant, referring the same to your better consideration.'[1]

It is scarcely by the display of such literary tactics as these that a Jesuit will succeed in putting to shame the credulity of unbelievers who may be so far misguided by heretical reliance on a groundless tradition as to attribute the practice of holy prevarication, and the doctrine of an end which sanctifies the most equivocal means of action or modes of argument, to the ingenuous and guileless children of Ignatius. For refutation of these inexplicable calumnies and explosion of this unaccountable error we must too evidently look elsewhere.

An elder luminary of the Roman Church, the most brilliant and impudent chronicler of courtly brothelry between the date of Petronius and the date of Grammont, has left on record that when news came to Paris of the execution at Fotheringay the general verdict passed by most of her old acquaintances on the Queen Dowager of France was that her death was a just if lamentable retribution for the death of Chastelard. The despatch of a disloyal husband by means of gunpowder was not, in the eyes of these Catholic moralists, an offence worth mention if set against the execution of a loyal lover, 'even in her sight he loved so well.' That the luckless young rhymester and swordsman had been Mary's favoured lover—a circumstance which would of course have given no scandal whatever to the society in which they had grown up to years of indiscretion—can be neither affirmed nor denied on the authority of any positive and incontrovertible proof: and the value of such moral if not legal evidence as we possess depends mainly on the credit which we may be disposed to assign to the reported

[1] 'Who would have thought,' says Father Morris, just seventy-four pages earlier, with a triumphant sneer at Mr. Froude's gratuitous inferences, 'who would have thought that all this could have been drawn out of Poulet's postscript?' Who would have thought that the merest novice in controversy could have laid himself so heedlessly open to such instant and inevitable retort?

statement of Murray.[1] Knox, who will not generally be held capable of deliberate forgery and lying, has left an account of the affair which can hardly be regarded as a possible misrepresentation or perversion of fact, with some grain of discoloured and distorted truth half latent in a heap of lies. Either the falsehood is absolute, or the conclusion is obvious.

The first sentences of his brief narrative may be set down as giving merely an austere and hostile summary of common rumours. That Chastelard 'at that tyme passed all otheris in credytt with the Quene'; that 'in dansing of the Purpose, (so terme thei that danse, in the which man and woman talkis secreatlie—wyese men wold judge such fassionis more lyke to the bordell than to the comelynes of honest wemen,) in this danse the Quene chosed Chattelett, and Chattelett took the Quene'; that 'Chattelett had the best dress'; that 'all this winter' (1563) 'Chattelett was so familiare in the Quenis cabinett, ayre and laitt, that scarslye could any of the Nobilitie have access unto hir'; that 'the Quene wold ly upoun Chattelettis shoulder, and sometymes prively she wold steall a kyss of his neck'; these are records which we may or may not pass by as mere court gossip retailed by the preacher, and to be taken with or without discount as the capable and equanimous reader shall think fit. We may presume however that the prophet-humourist did not append the following comment without sardonic intention. 'And all this was honest yneuch; for it was the gentill entreatment of a stranger.' The kernel of the matter lies in the few sentences following.

[1] Mr. Hosack, with even unusual infelicity, observes (ii. 494) that 'the insinuations regarding Chatelar (*sic*) to be found in Knox were circulated long after the event.' According to the 'chronological notes' of Mr. David Laing (*Works of John Knox*, vol. i. p. 20) is in 1566, just three years 'after the event,' that 'he appears to have written the most considerable portion of his History of the Reformation; having commenced the work in 1559 or 1560.' And whatever else may be chargeable against the memory of John Knox, this, I should imagine, is the first time that he has ever been held up to historic scorn as an insinuating antagonist.

'But the familiaritie was so great, that upoun a nycht, he privelie did convoy him self under the Quenis bed; but being espyed, he was commanded away. But the bruyte arysing, the Quene called the Erle of Murray, and bursting forth in a womanlie affectioun, charged him, "That as he loved hir, he should slay Chattelett, and let him never speak word." The other, at the first, maid promesse so to do; but after calling to mynd the judgementis of God pronunced against the scheddaris of innocent bloode, and also that none should dye, without the testimonye of two or thre witnesses, returned and fell upoun his kneis befoir the Quene, and said, "Madam, I beseak your Grace, cause me not tack the bloode of this man upoun me. Your Grace has entreated him so familiarlie befoir, that ye have offended all your Nobilitie; and now yf he shalbe secreatlie slane at your awin commandiment, what shall the world judge of it? I shall bring him to the presence of Justice, and let him suffer be law according to his deserving." "Oh," said the Quene, "ye will never let him speak?" "I shall do," said he, "Madam, what in me lyeth to saiff your honour."'[1]

'Upon this hint I spake,' when in the last year of my life as an undergraduate I began my play of *Chastelard*; nor have I to accuse myself, then or since, of any voluntary infraction of recorded fact or any conscious violation of historical chronology, except—to the best of my recollection—in two instances: the date of Mary's second marriage, and the circumstances of her last interview with John Knox. I held it as allowable to anticipate by two years the event of Darnley's nuptials, or in other words to postpone for two years the event of Chastelard's execution, as to compile or condense into one dramatic scene the details of more than one conversation recorded by Knox between Mary and himself.

To accept the natural and unavoidable inference from the foregoing narrative, assuming of course that it is not to be dismissed on all accounts as pure and simple falsehood, may seem equivalent to an admission that the worst view ever yet taken of Queen Mary's character is at least no worse than was

[1] *The History of the Reformation in Scotland*, Book IV.: *The Works of John Knox;* collected and edited by David Laing. Vol. ii., p. 368.

undeniably deserved. And yet, without any straining of moral law or any indulgence in paradoxical casuistry, there is something if not much to be offered in her excuse. To spare the life of a suicidal young monomaniac who would not accept his dismissal with due submission to the inevitable and suppression of natural regret, would probably in her own eyes have been no less than ruin to her character under the changed circumstances and in the transformed atmosphere of her life. As, in extenuation of his perverse and insuppressible persistency in thrusting himself upon the compassion or endurance of a woman who possibly was weary of his homage, it may doubtless be alleged that Mary Stuart was hardly such a mistress as a man could be expected readily to resign, or perhaps, at Chastelard's age, to forego with much less reluctance than life itself; so likewise may it be pleaded on the other hand that the queen of Scotland could not without at least equal unreason be expected to sacrifice her reputation and imperil her security for the sake of a cast-off lover who could not see that it was his duty as a gentleman of good sense to submit himself and his passion to her pleasure and the force of circumstances. The act of Chastelard was the act of a rebel as surely as the conduct of Darnley three years afterwards was the conduct of a traitor; and by all the laws then as yet unrepealed, by all precedents and rights of royalty, the life of the rebellious lover was scarce less unquestionably forfeit than the life of the traitorous consort. Nobody in those days had discovered the inestimable secret of being royalists or Christians by halves. At least, it was an unpromising time for any one who might attempt to anticipate this popular modern discovery.

It must be admitted that Queen Mary was generally and singularly unlucky in her practical assertion of prerogative. To every one of her royal descendants, with the possible exception of King Charles the Second, she transmitted this single incapacity by way of counterpoise to all the splendid and seductive gifts which she likewise bequeathed to not a few of their luckless line. They were a race of brilliant blunderers.

with obtuse exceptions interspersed. To do the right thing at the wrong time, to fascinate many and satisfy none, to display every kind of faculty but the one which might happen to be wanted, was as fatally the sign of a Stuart as ever ferocity was of a Claudius or perjury of a Bonaparte. After the time of Queen Mary there were no more such men born into the race as her father and half-brother. The habits of her son were as suggestive of debased Italian blood in the worst age of Italian debasement as the profitless and incurable cunning with which her grandson tricked his own head off his shoulders, the swarthy levity and epicurean cynicism of his elder son, or the bloody piety and sullen profligacy of his younger. The one apparently valid argument against the likelihood of their descent from Rizzio is that Darnley would undoubtedly seem to have pledged what he called his honour to the fact of his wife's infidelity. Towards that unhappy traitor her own conduct was not more merciless than just, or more treacherous than necessary, if justice was at all to be done upon him. In the house of Medici or in the house of Lorraine she could have found and cited at need in vindication of her strategy many far less excusable examples of guile as relentless and retaliation as implacable as that which lured or hunted a beardless Judas to his doom. If the manner in which justice was done upon him will hardly be justified by the most perverse and audacious lover of historical or moral paradox, yet neither can the most rigid upholder of moral law in whom rigour has not got the upper hand of reason deny that never was a lawless act committed with more excuse or more pretext for regarding it as lawful. To rid herself of a traitor and murderer who could not be got rid of by formal process of law was the object and the problem which the action of Darnley had inevitably set before his royal consort. That the object was attained and the problem solved with such inconceivable awkwardness and perfection of mismanagement is proof that no infusion of Guisian blood or training of Medicean education could turn the daughter of an old heroic northern line

into a consummate and cold intriguer of the southern Catholic pattern. The contempt of Catherine for her daughter-in-law when news reached Paris of the crowning blunder at Kirk of Field must have been hardly expressible by human utterance. At her best and worst alike, it seems to my poor apprehension that Mary showed herself a diplomatist only by education and force of native ability brought to bear on a line of life and conduct most alien from her inborn impulse as a frank, passionate, generous, unscrupulous, courageous and loyal woman, naturally self-willed and trained to be self-seeking, born and bred an imperial and royal creature, at once in the good and bad or natural and artificial sense of the words. In such a view I can detect no necessary incoherence; in such a character I can perceive no radical inconsistency. But 'to assert,' as Mr. Hosack says (ch. 27), 'that any human being,' neither a born idiot nor a spiritless dastard, 'could have been guilty' of such utterly abject and despicable conduct as the calumnious advocates of her innocence find themselves compelled to impute to her, 'is,' as I have always thought and must always continue to think, 'an absurdity which refutes itself.' The theory that an 'unscrupulous oligarchy at length accomplished her ruin by forcing her'—of all things in the world—'to marry Bothwell' is simply and amply sufficient, if accepted, to deprive her of all claim on any higher interest or any nobler sympathy than may be excited by the sufferings of a beaten hound. Indeed, the most impossible monster of incongruous merits and demerits which can be found in the most chaotic and inconsequent work of Euripides or Fletcher is a credible and coherent production of consistent nature if compared with Mr. Hosack's heroine Outside the range of the clerical and legal professions it should be difficult to find men of keen research and conscientious ability who can think that a woman of such working brain and burning heart as never faltered, never quailed, never rested till the end had come for them of all things, could be glorified by degradation to the likeness of a brainless, heartless, sexless and pusillanimous fool.

Supposing she had taken part in the slaying of Darnley, there is every excuse for her; supposing she had not, there is none. Considered from any possible point of view, the tragic story of her life in Scotland admits but of one interpretation which is not incompatible with the impression she left on all friends and all foes alike. And this interpretation is simply that she hated Darnley with a passionate but justifiable hatred, and loved Bothwell with a passionate but pardonable love. For the rest of her career, I cannot but think that whatever was evil and ignoble in it was the work of education or of circumstance; whatever was good and noble, the gift of nature or of God.

THE END.

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